

Uittreksels uit die
NUWE LEWENDE VERTALING

DIE STORIE

'n Aaneenlopende verhaal van God en sy mense



VOORWOORD DEUR
MAX LUCADO & RANDY FRAZEE

Selections from the
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

THE STORY

THE BIBLE AS ONE CONTINUING STORY OF GOD AND HIS PEOPLE



FOREWORD BY
MAX LUCADO & RANDY FRAZEE

THE STORY

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Inhoudsopgawe

Voorwoord deur Max Lucado en Randy Frazee

Inleiding

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Welcome to *The Story*—God's Story

THIS BOOK TELLS THE GRANDEST, most compelling story of all time: the story of a true God who loves his children, who established for them a way of salvation and provided a route to eternity. Each story in these 31 chapters reveals the God of grace — the God who speaks; the God who acts; the God who listens; the God whose love for his people culminated in his sacrifice of Jesus, his only Son, to atone for the sins of humanity.

What's more: this same God is alive and active today — still listening, still acting, still pouring out his grace on us. His grace extends to our daily foibles; our ups, downs, and in-betweens; our moments of questions and fears; and most important, our response to his call on our lives. He's the same God who forgave David's failures and rescued Jonah from the dark belly of a fish. This same heavenly Father who shepherded the Israelites through the wilderness desires to shepherd us through our wanderings, to help us get past our failures and rescue us for eternity.

It's our prayer that these stories will encourage you to listen for God's call on your life, as he helps write your own story.

MAX LUCADO and RANDY FRAZEE

Welkom by *Die storie* – God se storie

Hierdie boek vertel die grootse, dringendste storie van alle tye: die storie van 'n ware God wat lief is vir sy kinders, wat vir hulle verlossing voorsien het en 'n weg na die ewigheid. Elke storie in hierdie 31 hoofstukke openbaar die God van genade – die God wat praat; die God wat optree; die God wat luister; die God wie se liefde vir sy mense die toppunt bereik wanneer Hy sy Seun, sy enigste Seun, opoffer om vir die sondes van die mensdom te betaal.

Hierdie selfde God is vandag nog lewend en werksaam – Hy luister steeds, tree steeds op, stort steeds sy genade oor ons uit. Sy genade strek tot by ons daaglikse swakhede; ons goeie en slegte tye en ons tussenintye; ons oomblikke van vrae en vrese; en die belangrikste van almal, ons reaksie op sy roeping vir ons lewens. Hy is dieselfde God wat Dawid se mislukkings vergewe het en vir Jona uit die donkerte van 'n vis se maag gered het. Dieselfde hemelse Vader wat die Israeliete deur die woestyn gelei het, wil ons op ons paaie lei, en ons help om oor ons mislukkings te kom en ons red vir die ewigheid.

Dit is ons gebed dat hierdie stories jou sal aanmoedig om bedag te wees op die Here se roeping vir jou lewe, terwyl Hy jou help om jou eie storie te skryf.

Max Lucado en Randy Frazee

Preface

THE STORY, through its unique and easy-to-read format, opens a door to God's truth. It's a door that every person is consciously or unconsciously searching for. A door that leads to freedom, hope and God himself! The Bible is filled with exciting and

intense stories of love, war, birth, death and miracles. There's poetry, culture, history and theology. It's a suspense novel, a book of sociology, a history lesson — all woven around one eternal conflict: good versus evil. This story offers a glimpse of people in a different time and place who are yet very much like us today.

As you read *The Story* you will encounter not only the story of humankind but also the story of who God is and what he has done for us — for *you*. This story makes the insistent claim that a loving God has sought you and provided a way of redemption — a way for you to enter a relationship with him.

The Story includes the actual, God-breathed words of the Bible. The 31 chapters that comprise *The Story* contain portions of Scripture that were thoughtfully and carefully excerpted and then placed in chronological order. Transitions, which appear in *Italic*, were written to summarize omitted Scripture text in order to help the storyline read smoothly. The texts were chosen to retain the overall flow of the narrative, so that when you read this story, you will get a sense of the “big picture” of the Bible. Line spaces were added when text was omitted, and a chart at the back of this book will let you know what portions of Scripture were included.

Other helpful material placed at the end of *The Story* include an epilogue that gives you an idea of the global impact this story has had on the world, a discussion guide with questions for you to reflect on personally or with a group and a cast of characters with brief descriptions so that you can tell who's who at a glance.

The Scripture text used in *The Story* is taken from the New International Version (NIV). Our goal was to make

the Bible read smoothly and easily, so that you can read it just like you'd read a novel. But *The Story* you're reading isn't any ordinary story. You are reading a story that has the power to change who you are, what you think and how you view life. You are exposing yourself to deep, transforming truth. So sit back and enjoy the truest, greatest story ever written.

Inleiding

Met sy unieke en lekkerlees-formaat, open Die storie die deur na God se waarheid. Dit is 'n deur waarna elke mens bewustelik of onbewustelik op soek is. 'n Deur wat lei na vryheid, hoop, en God self! Die Bybel is vol opwindende en kragtige verhale oor liefde, oorlog, geboorte, dood en wonderwerke. Daar is poësie, kultuur, geskiedenis en teologie. Dit is 'n spanningsverhaal, 'n boek oor sosiologie, 'n geskiedenisles – en alles wentel om een ewigdurende konflik: goed teen kwaad. Hierdie storie gee vir ons 'n kykie op die lewens van mense wat in 'n ander tyd en plek geleef het, maar tog baie soos ons vandag is.

Terwyl jy *Die storie* lees, gaan jy nie net te doen kry met die storie van die mensdom nie, maar ook met die storie van wie God is en wat Hy vir ons gedoen het – vir jǃu. Hierdie storie dring daarop aan dat 'n liefdevolle God na jou gesoek het en 'n weg na verlossing gegee het – 'n manier waarop jy in 'n verhouding met Hom kan staan.

Die storie sluit God se werklike woorde van die Bybel in. *Die storie* bied gedeeltes uit die Bybel wat sorgsaam en versigtig uitgesoek is en toe in chronologiese volgorde geplaas is. Oorgange, wat kursief is, is geskryf om die gedeeltes wat uitgelaat is op te som sodat die storielyn gemaklik lees. Die teksgedeeltes is gekies om die totale vloei van die vertelling te behou sodat jy die “groot prentjie” van die Bybel kan kry wanneer jy die storie lees. Daar is lynspasies ingesit wanneer teks weggelaat is, en 'n lys van verwysings agter in die boek sal vir jou wys watter Skrifgedeeltes ingesluit is.

Ander handige materiaal wat agter in *Die storie* voorkom, is 'n epiloog wat vir jou 'n idee gee van die impak wat hierdie storie op die wêreld gehad het, besprekingsvrae waaroor jy alleen kan dink of vir groepbesprekings kan gebruik en 'n lys van karakters met kort beskrywings sodat jy vinnig kan sien wie is wie.

Die Skrifverwysings wat in *Die storie* gebruik is, kom uit die *Nuwe Lewende Vertaling* (NLV). Ons doel was om die Bybel maklik te laat lees sodat jy dit kan lees net soos jy 'n gewone storieboek sou lees.

Maar *Die storie* wat jy lees, is nie 'n gewone storie nie. Jy lees 'n storie wat oor die mag beskik om te verander wie jy is, wat jy dink en hoe jy die lewe sien. Jy stel jou bloot aan 'n diep waarheid wat die krag het om jou te verander.

Sit terug en geniet die waarste en wonderlikste storie wat ooit geskryf is.

Timeline of *The Story**

1 Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It

Creation

Noah and the Flood Abram born (2166)

2 God Builds a Nation

Abram moves to Canaan (2091)

Isaac born (2066)

Abraham offers Isaac (2050)

Rebekah gives birth to Jacob and Esau (2006)

Abraham dies (1991)

Rachel gives birth to Joseph (1915)

Isaac dies (1886)

3 Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt (1898)

Jacob and family settle in Egypt (1876)

Jacob dies (1859)

Joseph dies (1805)

4 Deliverance

Moses is born (1526)

God sends the plagues (1446)

The exodus, Red Sea crossed (1446)

Wilderness wanderings, God sends quail and manna
(1446–1406)

5 New Commands and a New Covenant

Moses receives the Ten Commandments (1445)

Moses spends 40 days and 40 nights on Mount Sinai
(1445)

Aaron and the golden calf (1445)

Building of the tabernacle (1445)

6 Wandering

Wilderness wanderings, God sends quail and manna
(1446–1406) Spies sent to Canaan (1443)

Aaron dies (1406)

Israelites camp in the plains of Moab (1406)

Moses dies (1406)

7 The Battle Begins

Joshua appointed leader (1406)

Israelites enter Canaan (1406)

Conquest of Canaan (1406–1375) Joshua dies (1375)

8 A Few Good Men ... and Women

Judges begin to rule (1375)

Deborah's rule (1209–1169)

Gideon's rule (1162–1122)

Samson's rule (1075–1055)

9 The Faith of a Foreign Woman

Time of the judges (1375–1050)

Naomi and Ruth return from Moab Ruth meets Boaz

Boaz marries Ruth

10 Standing Tall, Falling Hard

Hannah gives birth to Samuel (1105)

Samuel ministers under Eli The Israelites ask for a
king Saul's reign (1050–1010)

11 From Shepherd to King

Samuel anoints David (1025)

David kills Goliath (1025)

Saul repeatedly tries to kill David

Saul dies (1010)

David named king (1010)

12 The Trials of a King

David's reign (1010–970)

David commits adultery with Bathsheba

Solomon's reign (970–930)

Building of the temple (966–959)

13 The King Who Had It All

David dies (970)

Solomon's reign (970–930)

Solomon displays great wisdom

Building of the temple (966–959)

Solomon marries foreign wives and betrays God

14 A Kingdom Torn in Two

Division of the kingdom (930)

King Jeroboam I of Israel reigns (930–909)

King Rehoboam of Judah reigns (930–913)

King Ahab of Israel reigns (874–853)

King Jehoshaphat of Judah (872–848)

15 God's Messengers

Elijah's ministry in Israel (875–848)

Elisha's ministry in Israel (c. 848–797)

Amos's ministry in Israel (760–750)

Hosea's ministry in Israel (750–715)

16 The Beginning of the End (of the Kingdom of Israel)

Fall of Israel (722)

Exile of Israel to Assyria (722)

Isaiah's ministry in Judah (740–681)

Hezekiah's reign (715–686)

17 The Kingdoms' Fall

Manasseh's reign (697–642)

Amon's reign (642–640)

Josiah's reign (640–609)

Jeremiah's ministry in Judah (626–585)

Jehoiakim's reign (609–598)

Zedekiah's reign (597–586)

Ezekiel's ministry (593–571)

Fall of Jerusalem (586)

18 Daniel in Exile

Daniel exiled to Babylon (605)

Daniel's ministry (605–536)

Nebuchadnezzar's reign (605–562)

Daniel and the lions' den (539)

Fall of Babylon (539)

19 The Return Home

First return of exiles to Jerusalem (538)

Ministries of Haggai and Zechariah (520–480)

Exiles face opposition in building the temple
Temple restoration completed (516)

20 The Queen of Beauty and Courage

Xerxes' reign in Persia (486–465)

Esther becomes queen of Persia (479)

Esther saves the Jews from Haman's murderous plot

Days of Purim are established

21 Rebuilding the Walls

Second return of exiles to Jerusalem under Ezra (458)

Last group of exiles return to Jerusalem under
Nehemiah (445)

Exiles face opposition in rebuilding the wall

Jerusalem's wall rebuilt (445)

Malachi's ministry (c. 440–430)

22 The Birth of the King

Mary gives birth to Jesus the Messiah (6/5)

Joseph, Mary and Jesus' flight to Egypt (5/4)

Jesus' visit to the temple (AD 7/8)

23 Jesus' Ministry Begins

John the Baptist begins ministry (26)

Jesus baptized (26)

Jesus begins ministry (26)

Wedding at Cana (27)

The woman at the well (27)
John the Baptist imprisoned (27/28)

24 No Ordinary Man

Jesus begins ministry (26)
Jesus uses parables to teach (26)
Jesus gives Sermon on the Mount (28)
Jesus sends closest followers out to preach (28)
John the Baptist dies (28/29)
Jesus feeds 5,000 people (29)
Jesus proclaims himself as the bread of life (29)

25 Jesus, the Son of God

Jesus begins ministry (26)
Jesus teaches at the Mount of Olives (29)
Jesus resurrects Lazarus (29)
Jesus drives the money changers from the temple (30)
Judas betrays Jesus (30)

26 The Hour of Darkness

The Lord's Supper (30)
Jesus washes his disciples' feet
Jesus comforts his disciples
Jesus is arrested
Peter denies Jesus
Jesus is crucified

27 The Resurrection

Jesus is buried (30)
Jesus is resurrected
Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and the disciples

28 New Beginnings

Jesus' ascension (30)
Coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
Paul believed in Jesus as the promised Messiah (35)
James martyred, Peter imprisoned (44)
Paul's first missionary journey (46–48)

29 Paul's Mission

Paul's first missionary journey (46–48)

Jerusalem Council (49–50)

Paul's second missionary journey (50–52)

Paul's third missionary journey (53–57)

30 Paul's Final Days

Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (59–62)

Paul's second imprisonment in Rome and execution
(67–68)

John exiled on Patmos (90–95)

31 The End of Time

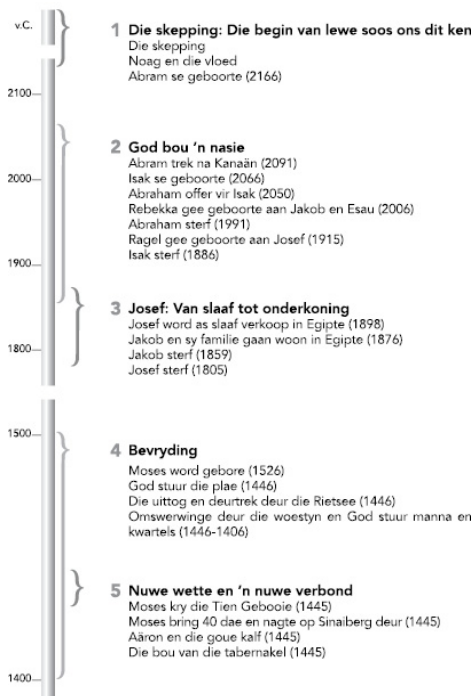
John becomes a disciple (26)

John exiled on Patmos (90–95)

Revelation written (95)

**Dates are approximate and dependent on the interpretative theories of various scholars.*

**Die datums is by benadering en berus op die interpretasieteorieë van verskeie teoloë.*





13 Die koning wat alles gehad het

Dawid sterf (970)
 Salomo se bewind (970-930)
 Salomo toon groot wysheid
 Die tempel word gebou (966-959)
 Salomo trou met heidense vroue en verrai vir God

14 'n Koninkryk in twee geskeur

Verdeling van die koninkryk (930)
 Koning Jerobeam I heers oor Israel (930-909)
 Koning Rehabeam van Juda heers (930-913)
 Koning Agab van Israel heers (874-853)
 Koning Josef van Juda heers (872-848)

15 God se boodskappers

Elia se bediening in Israel (875-848)
 Elisa se bediening in Israel (c. 848-797)
 Amos se bediening in Israel (760-750)
 Hosea se bediening in Israel (750-715)

16 Die begin van die einde (van die koninkryk van Israel)

Die val van Israel (722)
 Israel se ballingskap na Assirië (722)
 Jesaja se bediening in Juda (740-681)
 Hiskia se bewind (715-686)

17 Die koninkryke kom tot 'n val

Manasse se bewind (697-642)
 Amon se bewind (642-640)
 Josia se bewind (640-609)
 Jeremia se bediening in Juda (626-585)
 Jojakim se bewind (609-598)
 Selekia se bewind (597-586)
 Ezechiël se bediening (593-571)
 Die val van Jerusalem (586)

18 Daniël in ballingskap

Daniël word na Babilonië verban (605)
 Daniël se bediening (605-536)
 Nebukadnesar se bewind (605-562)
 Daniël in die leeu-kuil (539)
 Die val van Babilonië (539)

v.C.		19 Die terugkeer huis toe
550		Eerste terugkeer van bannelinge na Jerusalem (538)
		Haggai en Sagaria se bedienings (520-480)
		Bannelinge kry teenstand met die bou van die tempel
		Tempel se herstel afgehandel (516)
500		
		20 'n Koningin met skoonheid en moed
		Ahasveros se bewind in Persië (486-465)
		Ester word koningin van Persië (479)
		Ester red die Jode van Haman se moorddadige komplot
		Die Purimfees word ingestel
450		
		21 Herbou die mure
		Tweede terugkeer van bannelinge onder leiding van Esra (458)
		Die laaste groep bannelinge keer terug na Jerusalem onder leiding van Nehemia (445)
		Die bannelinge ervaar teenstand in die herbou van die mure
		Jerusalem se muur is herbou (445)
		Maleagi se bediening (c. 440-430)
400		
10		
5 v.C.		
		22 Die geboorte van die Koning
		Maria gee geboorte aan Jesus die Messias (6/5)
		Josef, Maria en Jesus vlug na Egipte (5/4)
		Jesus besoek die tempel (AD 7/8)
5 n.C.		
10		
		23 Jesus se bediening begin
		Johannes die Doper se bediening begin (26)
		Jesus word gedoop (26)
		Jesus se bediening begin (26)
		Die bruilof in Kana (27)
		Die vrou by die put (27)
		Johannes die Doper word gevange geneem (27/28)
15		
20		
		24 Nie 'n gewone man nie
		Jesus se bediening begin (26)
		Jesus gebruik gelykenisse om te preek (26)
		Jesus se preek op die berg (28)
		Jesus stuur sy naaste navolgers om te gaan preek (28)
		Johannes die Doper sterf (28/29)
		Jesus gee vir 5 000 mense kos (29)
		Jesus sê Hy is die brood van die lewe (29)
25		
30		

n.C.	25 Jesus, die Seun van God
25	Jesus se bediening begin (26)
	Jesus gee onderrig op die Olyfberg (29)
	Jesus wek vir Lasarus uit die dood op (29)
	Jesus dryf die geldwisselaars uit die tempel (30)
30	Judas verrai vir Jesus (30)
	26 Die uur van duisternis
	Die Paasmaaltyd (30)
35	Jesus was sy dissipels se voete
	Jesus bemoedig sy dissipels
	Jesus word gearsteer
	Petrus verloor vir Jesus
40	Jesus word gekruisig
	27 Die opstanding
	Jesus word begrawe (30)
45	Jesus staan op uit die dood
	Jesus verskyn aan Maria Magdalena en die dissipels
	28 'n Nuwe begin
50	Jesus se hemelvaart (30)
	Die uitstorting van die Heilige Gees tydens Pinkster
	Paulus glo in Jesus as die beloofde Messias (35)
55	Jakobus word gemartel; Petrus word gearresteer (44)
	Paulus se eerste sendingreis (46-48)
	29 Paulus se sending
60	Paulus se eerste sendingreis (46-48)
	Die Raad van Jerusalem (49-50)
	Paulus se tweede sendingreis (50-52)
65	Paulus se derde sendingreis (53-57)
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70	Paulus se eerste gevangenskap in Rome (59-62)
	Paulus se tweede gevangenskap in Rome en doodstraf (67-68)
	Johannes word verban na Patmos (90-95)
	31 Die eindtyd
90	Johannes word 'n dissipel (26)
	Johannes word verban na Patmos (90-95)
95	Openbaring word geskryf (95)

1

Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It

IN THE BEGINNING God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate

water from water.” So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the second day.

And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the third day.



And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights — the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the fourth day.

And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the fifth day.

And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground,

and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image,

in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called ‘woman,’

for she was taken out of man.”

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

God had created a beautiful world and filled it with glorious, diverse creatures. Of all his creation, he singled out two humans to build a relationship with — Adam and Eve. These two people were blessed to share their paradise with each other and God, so why would they want anything else?

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten

from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock

and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel.”

To the woman he said,

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;

with painful labor you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,

and he will rule over you.”

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from

it,'

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”

Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.” Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering¹ to the

LORD. And Abel also brought an offering — fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin² is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

The tragic accounts of the mistakes and poor choices of Adam and Eve, and their firstborn son Cain, are echoed in the later stories of hardship and tragedy for their children and their children’s children. As people began to populate the globe, leaving the area of Eden and traveling as far as feet and beast could carry them, humanity’s legacy of hate, anger, murder and deception play out as people continue to neglect their relationship with God. Eventually, nearly everyone just plain forgets their Creator and the whole point of being alive. For most people, life becomes one big party with no thought of consequences ... except for one man.

The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created — and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground — for I regret that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous³ man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So God said to Noah, “I am going to

put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. But I will establish my covenant⁴ with you, and you will enter the ark — you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation.

Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.”

Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of

life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. Every living thing that moved on land perished — birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you — the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground — so they can multiply on the earth and be

fruitful and increase in number on it.”

So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds — everything that moves on land — came out of the ark, one kind after another.

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.”

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands.”

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you — the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you — every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

“Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

The earth recovered from this great flood. Animal and plant life flourished. Noah's family repopulated the earth. The cycle of life continued, and people remembered God. Ancient businesses grew, homesteads and farms developed, and trade routes brought wealth and opportunity for travel. It was time for God's next move, time to

build a nation in a land that would become the cultural and ethnic home to ... well, that part of the story is yet to come.

Abram (whose name God later changed to Abraham) had all the wrong qualifications for being a founder of God's nation: His relatives worshiped other gods in a country far from what would become the promised land; Abram and his wife, Sarai (whose name God later changed to Sarah), were way beyond childbearing years and Sarai couldn't get pregnant—no children meant no people to populate God's nation. No problem. God promised the impossible to Abram, and Abram watched as the impossible occurred. Here's how it happened.

1 Offering: Something given to God in an act of thankfulness, worship or payment for disobedience. In the Old Testament, there were five kinds of offerings: burnt, grain, fellowship, sin and guilt. The death of Jesus in the New Testament is the ultimate offering that paid the full price of sin. This word is synonymous with *sacrifice*.

2 Sin: Evil, moral shortcoming, wrongdoing or disobedience. This term refers to any action, thought or attitude that does not meet the standards set by God.

3 Righteous: Living according to the standards set by God. *God's righteousness* refers to his justice and perfection.

4 Covenant: An agreement or promise between two parties. A covenant was intended to be unbreakable.

1

Die skepping:

Die begin van lewe soos ons dit ken

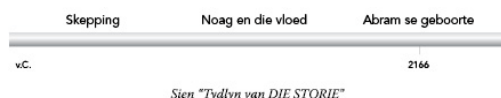
In die begin het God die ganse heelal geskep, die hemel daarbo en die aarde hieronder. Maar die aarde was 'n vormlose, onbewoonbare

massa, en die diep waters was toegevoeg in duisternis. Die Gees van God het oor die oppervlakte van die water gesweef.

Toe beveel God: “Laat daar lig wees!” en dit was so. Die lig was vir God goed. Daarop het God die lig en die donkerte van mekaar geskei. God het die lig “dag” genoem en die donkerte “nag”. Dit alles het op die eerste dag gebeur.

God het beveel: “Laat daar skeiding kom tussen die waters!” So het God die hemelkoepel gemaak wat die water bokant die aarde skei van die water onder op die aarde. Dit het alles net so gebeur. God noem toe die blou koepel “hemel”. Dit het op die tweede dag gebeur.

God het beveel: “Laat die water op die aarde op een plek bymekaarkom sodat die droë grond te voorskyn kan kom!” Dit het presies so gebeur. God noem toe die droë grond “land” en die versameling water noem Hy “see”. Ook dit was vir God goed.



Toe beveel God: “Laat plante uit die grond voortspruit wat saad dra en ook vrugtebome wat vrugte gee.” En dit het gebeur. Die aarde het toe sulke plante voortgebring, asook vrugtebome van allerlei soorte. God het gesien dat dit goed was. Dit het op die derde dag gebeur.

God het beveel: “Laat daar ligte wees aan die hemelkoepel sodat dag en nag onderskei kan word en dit ook kan dien as tekens om seisoene, dae en jare te bepaal. Die ligte in die hemelkoepel moet ook die aarde verlig.” Dit het toe so gebeur. So het God die twee groot ligte gemaak: die grootste om in die dag te skyn en die kleiner een om in die nag te skyn. Hy het ook die sterre gemaak. God het hierdie ligte in die hemelkoepel geplaas om die aarde te verlig, die een in die dag en die ander in die nag en ook om lig en donkerte van mekaar te skei. God het gesien dat dit goed was. Dit het op die vierde dag gebeur.

God het verder beveel: “Laat die waters wemel van lewende wesens en laat voëls bo in die lug oor die aarde vlieg.” God het die groot seediëre geskep, al die verskillende soorte wesens wat in die water lewe, asook al die baie soorte voëls. God was tevrede met wat Hy gesien het. God het hulle geseën deur te sê: “Wees vrugbaar, vermeerder en vul die oseane en laat die voëls op die aarde vermeerder.” Dit het op die vyfde dag gebeur.

God het weer beveel: “Laat die aarde allerlei soorte diere oplewer: mak diere, diere wat kruip en wilde diere – almal na eie aard.” Dit het

presies so gebeur. So het God allerlei soorte wilde diere gemaak, mak diere en diere wat op die grond kruip. God het gesien dit was goed.

God sê toe: “Laat Ons ’n mens maak wat met Ons ooreenstem om te heers oor die visse in die see, oor die voëls in die lug, oor die mak diere, oor die wilde diere, en oor alles wat op die aarde kruip.”

God het die mens in ooreenstemming met Homself geskep;
volgens sy eie beeld het God hulle geskep;
manlik en vroulik het Hy hulle geskep.

God het hulle geseën deur te sê: “Wees vrugbaar en vermeerder en vul die aarde. Onderwerp die aarde en heers oor die visse van die see, die voëls in die lug en oor al die diere op die aarde.”

Verder sê God: “Let op, Ek het aan julle al die plante wat saad dra, gegee en al die bome wat vrugte en saad gee. Dit is vir julle om van te eet. Maar die groen gras en plante gee Ek aan al die diere op die aarde, die voëls in die lug en die klein diertjies wat op die aarde kruip.” Dit het so gebeur.

God het na sy handewerk gekyk en dit was uitstekend goed. Dit alles het God op die sesde dag gemaak. So is die skepping van die hemel en die aarde en alles wat daarin is, voltooi.

Op die sewende dag was God klaar met alles wat Hy gemaak het en Hy het op die sewende dag na al sy werk gerus. God het ook die sewende dag geseën. Hy het bepaal dat dit afgesonder moet word van die ander dae omdat Hy op daardie dag gerus het nadat Hy sy skeppingswerk gedoen het. Dit is dan die geskiedenis van die skepping van die hemel en die aarde.

Toe die HERE God die aarde en die hemel gemaak het, was daar nog geen struik of groen gras op die aarde nie, want die HERE God het dit nog nie laat reën nie. Daar was nog nie ’n mens wat die grond kon bewerk nie. Maar water het uit die aarde opgeborrel en so is die grond natgemaak. Toe vorm die HERE God ’n menslike liggaam uit die stof van die aarde. Nadat Hy die asem van die lewe daarin geblaas het, het dit ’n lewende wese, die mens, geword.

Daarna het die HERE God ’n tuin in Eden in die ooste geplant. Hy het die mens wat Hy geskape het daarin laat woon. Die HERE God het ook verskillende soorte bome uit die grond laat opkom. Dit was mooi bome met heerlike vrugte. Die boom van die lewe het Hy in die middel van die tuin geplant en ook die boom van kennis van wat reg en verkeerd is.

Die HERE God het die mens in die Tuin van Eden aangestel om dit te bewerk en te versorg. Maar die HERE God het hom gewaarsku: “Jy is vry om van enige boom in die tuin te eet, maar van die boom van kennis van reg en verkeerd mag jy nie eet nie. As jy daarvan eet, sal jy beslis sterf.”

Daarna sê die HERE God: “Dis nie goed dat die mens alleen is nie. Ek sal vir hom ’n metgesel maak, een soos hy.”

Toe het die HERE God uit die grond al die verskillende soorte diere en voëls gevorm. Daarop neem Hy hulle na die mens toe om te sien wat hy hulle sou noem. En die mens het vir elkeen ’n naam gegee, vir al die mak diere, die voëls en wilde diere.

Hy kon egter onder hulle nie een kry wat soos hy is en vir hom ’n metgesel kon wees nie. Toe het die HERE God die mens baie diep laat slaap. Terwyl hy slaap, vat Hy een van die mens se ribbebene en vul die plek weer op met vleis. Van die ribbebeen maak die HERE God toe ’n vrou en bring haar na die mens toe.

“Uiteindelik is dit die regte metgesel!” sê die mens. “Sy is regtig deel van my. Sy sal ‘vrou’ genoem word, want sy is uit die man geneem.” Dit verklaar waarom ’n man van sy pa en ma weggaan, saam met sy vrou lewe en hulle dan soos een mens word. Alhoewel die mens en sy vrou sonder klere was, was hulle nie skaam vir mekaar nie.

God het ’n pragtige wêreld geskep en dit gevul met wonderlike, diverse skepsels. Van al sy skeppingswerke het Hy twee mense uitgesonder om ’n verhouding mee te bou – Adam en Eva. Hierdie twee mense was geseënd om hulle paradys met mekaar en met God te deel, waarom sou hulle dan enigiets anders wou hê?

Die slang was listiger as al die diere wat die HERE God gemaak het. “Is dit regtig so?” vra hy vir die vrou. “Het God regtig gesê julle mag niks van die vrugte in die tuin eet nie?”

“Natuurlik mag ons van die vrugte eet,” sê die vrou. “Dis net van die vrugte van die boom in die middel van die tuin wat ons nie mag eet nie of selfs aan raak nie, anders sal ons sterf.”

“Julle sal nie sterf nie!” sê die slang. “God weet dat julle oë sal oopgaan wanneer julle daarvan eet. Julle sal dan net soos God wees en weet van goed en kwaad.”

Dit het die vrou oortuig. Wanneer sy na die boom kyk, lyk die vrugte mooi en aanloklik, geskik om ’n mens verstandig en slim te maak. Sy pluk ’n vrug van die boom, eet daarvan en gee vir haar man

by haar; en hy het ook geëet. Toe gaan hulle oë werklik oop en besef hulle dat hulle sonder klere is. Hulle het vyeblare aanmeakaargewerk en vir hulle omgehang om hulleself toe te maak.

Teen die aand hoor hulle hoe die HERE God in die tuin loop. Hulle kruip toe weg tussen die bome. Die HERE God het toe na die mens geroep: “Waar is jy?”

Hy antwoord: “Ek het U hoor aankom in die tuin en gaan wegkruip. Ek was bang omdat ek sonder klere is.”

“Wie het vir jou gesê dat jy sonder klere is?” vra die HERE God. “Het jy dan van die boom geëet wat Ek jou beveel het om nie te eet nie?”

“Ja,” erken die mens, “dit was die vrou wat U aan my gegee het wat die vrugte vir my aangebied het, en toe het ek daarvan geëet.”

Daarop vra die HERE God vir die vrou: “Hoe kon jy so ’n ding doen?”

“Die slang het my bedrieg,” antwoord sy. “Dis hoekom ek geëet het.”

Toe sê die HEREGod vir die slang:

“Omdat jy dit gedoen het, is jy vervloek

onder al die diere op die aarde.

Op jou pens sal jy seil en stof sal jy eet

so lank as wat jy lewe.

Van nou af sal jy en die vrou vyande wees.

Dit geld ook vir jou nageslag en haar nageslag.

Haar nageslag sal jou kop inslaan

en jy sal hom noodlottig aan die hakskeen byt.”

Vir die vrou sê Hy:

“Ek sal jou swangerskap moeilik maak;

met pyn en lyding sal jy kinders in die wêreld bring.

Jou begeerte sal na jou man wees,

maar hy sal oor jou heers.”

Vir die mens sê Hy: “Jy het jou deur jou vrou laat ompraat en van die vrugte geëet wat Ek jou verbied het om te doen.

“Daarom vervloek Ek die grond.

Jou hele lewe lank sal jy

met swaarkry sukkel om ’n bestaan daaruit te maak.

Dit sal vir jou dorings en dissels oplewer

en jy sal van die plante van die veld eet.
Jou hele lewe lank, tot die einde van jou dae,
sal jy met moeite werk om iets te hê om te eet.
Aan die einde van jou lewe sal jy
weer terugkeer na die grond waaruit jy geneem is.
Want jy is van stof gemaak
en jy sal weer stof word.”

Die mens het sy vrou Eva genoem omdat sy die moeder sou word van alle mense op die hele aarde.

Toe het die HERE God vir die mens en sy vrou klere van vel gemaak en hulle dit laat aantrek. Daarna sê die HERE God: “Die mens het nou soos een van Ons geword deurdat hulle ook weet van goed en kwaad. Wat sal gebeur as hulle van die vrugte van die boom van die lewe vat en eet? Hulle sal dan vir altyd lewe!” Die HERE God het daarom die mens uit die Tuin van Eden weggestuur om die grond te gaan bewerk waaruit hy geneem is. Nadat die HERE God hulle uit die tuin verban het, het Hy gerubs oos van Eden aangestel om met ’n vlamme swaard, wat heen en weer beweeg, die toegang tot die boom van die lewe te bewaak.

Die mens het by sy vrou, Eva, geslaap en sy het swanger geword. Sy het geboorte gegee aan Kain. Sy sê toe: “Met die hulp van die HERE het ek ’n man voortgebring!” Daarna het sy geboorte gegee aan sy broer Abel.

Toe hulle groot was, het Abel ’n veeboer geword en Kain ’n landbouer. Toe oestyd aanbreek, het Kain uit die opbrengs van sy landerye ’n offer vir die HERE gebring. Abel het die beste uit sy lammers, die eerstelinge van die seisoen, en van hulle vet as offer gebring. Die HERE het Abel en sy offer aanvaar, maar nie dié van Kain nie. Daaroor was Kain baie kwaad en neerslagtig.

“Hoekom is jy so kwaad?” vra die HERE vir hom. “Hoekom hang jou gesig so? Is daar nie aanvaarding vir jou as jy reg optree nie? Maar as jy weier om reg te doen, moet jy oppas! Sonde hurk by die deur om jou te oorweldig, maar jy moet dit oorwin.”

Kain het met sy broer Abel gepraat en terwyl hulle in die veld was, het Kain sy broer Abel aangeval en hom doodgeslaan.

Die tragiese geskiedenis van die foute en slegte keuses van Adam en Eva en hulle eersgebore seun, Kain, eggo in die latere stories van swaarkry en tragedie vir hulle kinders en hulle kinders se kinders. Soos mense die aarde begin bevolk het, die Eden-gebied verlaat het en

so ver getrek het as wat hulle voete en diere hulle kon dra, het die mensdom se nalatenskap van haat, woede, moord en bedrog voortgeduur soos die mense voortgegaan het om hulle verhouding met God te verwaarloos. Uiteindelik vergeet byna almal van hulle Skepper en die hele rede waarom hulle leef. Vir die meeste mense word die lewe een groot partytjie met geen gedagte aan die gevolge nie ... behalwe een man.

Die HERE het die omvang van die boosheid van die mensdom op aarde raakgesien. Hy het opgemerk dat hulle gedagtes gedurig sleg was. Die HERE was spyt dat Hy die mens op die aarde gemaak het. Dit het Hom diep bedroef. Daarom sê die HERE: “Ek sal die mensheid wat Ek gemaak het heeltemal uitwis van die aarde. Saam met hulle sal Ek ook al die diere, klein en groot, asook die voëls vernietig, want Ek is spyt dat Ek hulle gemaak het.” Maar die HERE was Noag goedgesind.

Wat volg, is die geskiedenis van Noag.

Noag was ’n opregte man, die enigste onberispelike persoon in daardie tyd. Hy het God se wil deurgaans uitgeleef en ’n noue verhouding met Hom gehad. Noag het drie seuns gehad, naamlik Sem, Gam en Jafet.

Teen hierdie tyd was die aarde volgens die oordeel van God korrupt en vol geweld. God het al hierdie korrupsie in die wêreld gesien. Oral waar Hy gekyk het, was daar geweld en bederf. Daarop sê God vir Noag: “Ek het besluit om alle lewende wesens te vernietig, want dis as gevolg van hulle dat die aarde vol geweld is. Ek gaan hulle almal verseker tot niet maak. Jy moet ’n groot ark van goferhout maak met verskillende vertrekke binne-in. Verseël dit binne en buite met teer. Dit moet 135 meter lank, 22,5 meter breed en 13,5 meter hoog wees. Voorsien dit van ’n dak waarvan die nok 45 sentimeter hoog is. Dit moet drie verdiepings hê en ’n deur aan die kant. Let op! Ek gaan vloedwaters oor die aarde laat kom wat elke lewende wese onder die son sal uitwis. Alles op aarde sal doodgaan. Maar met jou maak Ek ’n verbond. Jy, jou vrou, jou seuns en hulle vroue moet ingaan in die ark. Van elke soort dier moet jy ’n paar – ’n mannetjie en ’n wyfie – in die ark besorg sodat hulle saam met jou die vloed kan oorleef. Twee van elke soort voël en dier, klein en groot, sal na jou toe kom. Jy moet hulle in die ark aan die lewe hou. Maak seker dat jy genoeg kos inlaai vir jou gesin en vir al die diere.”

Noag het presies gemaak soos God hom beveel het. Die HERE het vir Noag gesê: “Jy en jou gesin moet in die ark ingaan, want onder al die mense op die aarde is dit jy alleen wat opreg lewe.

“Oor sewe dae sal Ek dit vir 40 dae en 40 nagte aanmekaar laat reën sodat alles wat Ek geskep het, van die aarde uitgewis word.”

Hy was 600 jaar oud toe die vloed begin het. Hy, sy vrou, sy seuns en hulle vroue het aan boord gegaan om die vloed te oorleef. Saam met hulle was daar diere van alle soorte: dié wat geëet en vir offers gebruik kon word, dié wat nie daarvoor goedgekeur was nie, asook van al die voëls en ander klein diertjies wat op die aarde kruip. Hulle het in pare, mannetjies en wyfies, na Noag by die ark gekom net soos God vir Noag beveel het. ’n Week later het die groot vloed losgebreek en die aarde oordek.

Op daardie selfde dag het Noag en sy vrou, saam met sy seuns, Sem, Gam en Jafet, asook hulle vroue, aan boord gegaan. Saam met hulle op die ark was daar mak diere, wilde diere, klein kruipende diere, voëls en vlieënde insekte van alle soorte. Van alles wat leef, het twee-twee saam met Noag op die ark gegaan. Dit was mannetjies en wyfies soos God beveel het. Toe het die HERE die deur van die ark agter hulle toegesluit.

Dit het 40 dae lank gereën en soos die waters vermeerder het, het dit die ark hoog bokant die grond opgelig. Die water het al meer geword en al hoër gestyg en die ark het daarop begin dryf. Die water het selfs so hoog gestyg dat die hoogste berge op die aarde onder water was. Die water het tot byna sewe meter bokant die hoogste berg gestyg. Alles wat op die aarde lewe, het vergaan – die voëls, mak diere, wilde diere, die klein kruipende diere en al die mense. Alles wat asemhaal op die droë grond het doodgegaan. Elke lewende wese op die aarde is uitgewis – mense, groot en klein diere en voëls. Hulle is almal dood. Net Noag en hulle wat saam met hom in die ark was, het oorleef. Die aarde was 150 dae lank onder water.

Maar God het gedink aan Noag en al die mense en diere by hom in die ark. Hy het ’n sterk wind oor die water laat waai en die watervloed het begin afneem. Die onderaardse waterbronne het opgehou om uit te borrel en die stortreën het bedaar. Geleidelik het die vloedwaters gesak. Na 150 dae het die watervlak só gesak dat die ark op die Araratberge vasgesit het, vyf maande nadat dit begin reën het. Twee en ’n halwe maande later het ander bergspitse sigbaar geword namate die water gesak het.

Toe Noag 601 jaar oud was, tien en ’n half maande nadat die vloed begin het, het Noag die luik van die ark oopgemaak en gesien dat die

aarde besig was om droog te word. Nog twee maande het verbygegaan en uiteindelik was die aarde droog genoeg.

Toe sê God vir Noag: “Gaan nou uit die ark, jy en jou gesin. Laat al die diere en voëls uit sodat hulle kan vermeerder en oor die aarde versprei.”

Noag en sy vrou, sy seuns en hulle vroue het toe uit die ark gegaan, asook al die verskillende soorte diere en voëls.

Noag bou toe ’n altaar vir die HERE en offer daarop van die diere en voëls wat vir hierdie doel bestem was. Die HERE het die offer aanvaar en vir Homself gesê: “Ek sal nooit weer die aarde vervloek weens die mens se oortredings nie. Immers, die mens se gedagtes is boos van sy jeug af. Ek sal nooit weer al die lewende wesens so vernietig nie.”

God het Noag en sy seuns geseën en vir hulle gesê: “Julle moet meer word deur baie kinders te hê en so die aarde te vul. Al die diere, groot en klein, asook al die voëls en visse sal vir julle bang wees. Ek stel hulle tot julle beskikking.”

God het met Noag en sy seuns gepraat: “Ek sluit ’n verbond met julle en julle nageslag, asook met die diere wat saam met julle is: die voëls en mak diere en wilde diere, met almal wat uit die ark gekom het. Ek onderneem dat Ek nooit weer ’n vloed sal stuur om alles wat lewe dood te maak en die aarde te verwoes nie.”

God het bygevoeg: “Om dit te bevestig, gee Ek aan julle en alle lewende wesens ’n teken van hierdie onderneming wat vir altyd sal geld. Die reënboog wat Ek in die wolke gesit het, sal die teken wees van hierdie blywende ooreenkoms met die aarde.”

“Sodra Ek die reënboog in die wolke sien, sal Ek herinner word aan die blywende verbond tussen My en alle lewende wesens op aarde.”

Die aarde het herstel van hierdie groot vloed. Die plant- en dierelewe het floreer. Noag se familie het die aarde herbevolk. Die lewensiklus het voortgegaan, en die mense het vir God onthou. Antieke besighede het gegroei, plase het ontwikkel en handelsroetes het rykdom en geleentheid vir reis gebring. Dit was tyd vir God se volgende skuif, tyd om ’n nasie te bou in ’n land wat die kulturele en etniese tuiste sou word vir ... wel, daardie deel van die storie kom nog. Abram (wie se naam later deur God na Abraham verander is) het al die verkeerde kwalifikasies gehad om die stigter van God se nasie te word: sy familie het ander gode aanbid in ’n land baie ver van wat die Beloofde Land

sou word; Abram en sy vrou, Sarai (wie se naam God later verander het na Sara), was al veels te oud om kinders te hê, en Sarai kon nie swanger word nie – geen kinders nie het beteken geen mense om God se nasie te bou nie. Geen probleem nie. God het die onmoontlike aan Abram belowe, en Abram het toegekyk hoe die onmoontlike gebeur. Hier is hoe dit gebeur het.

2

God Builds a Nation

THE LORD HAD SAID TO ABRAM, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

“I will make you into a great nation,

and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,

and you will be a blessing.

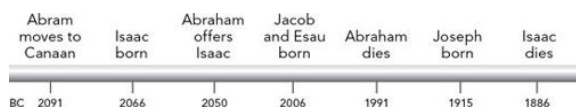
I will bless those who bless you,

and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth

will be blessed through you.”

So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.



By faith¹ Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together.

The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Lot made some bad decisions and found himself in deep trouble. He took up residence near Sodom. In retrospect, it was a poor choice of real estate. Soon the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah and three other kings squared off in battle against an enemy army. The kings of Sodom and Gomorrah lost, and the cities were looted. Lot and his family were among the captives.

When this news reached Abram, he pulled together 318 trusted men and without hesitation set out to rescue his nephew. Their night attack caught the looters by surprise. Abram freed the captives and recovered the spoil. Meeting a priest by the name of Melchizedek, he gave him a tenth of the spoils and delivered to the king what rightfully belonged to him.

Despite Abram's growing sense of God's power, one problem remained that even the Almighty seemed unable to solve. It was Abram's greatest worry and the main topic of his dialogues with God.

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram.

I am your shield,

your very great reward.”

But Abram said, “Sovereign² LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars — if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Abram believed that the promised child would come from his own body, but as far as he and Sarai knew, God didn't specify that Sarai would be the mother. In a move common during this time, they decided that Sarai's slave, Hagar, would be a surrogate mother for the promised child. However, after Hagar conceived, she and Sarai quarreled, and Hagar was sent away, helpless and pregnant to wander in the wilderness. Just as she despaired of her life, God spoke to her.

Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count."

The angel of the LORD also said to her:

"You are now pregnant

and you will give birth to a son.

You shall name him Ishmael,

for the LORD has heard of your misery.

He will be a wild donkey of a man;

his hand will be against everyone

and everyone's hand against him,

and he will live in hostility

toward all his brothers."

She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him

and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised.³ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

“Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

God also said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

Abraham gave the name Isaac⁴ to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

God gave Abraham a child of promise. But Abraham had a child already through Hagar — Ishmael. What would become of him?

The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, she began to sob.

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love — Isaac — and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld

from me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

Eventually Sarah died, and Abraham bought a field and buried her, wondering all the while what would become of him and Isaac and God’s promise. Abraham had taken another wife, a woman named Keturah, and had more children. Yet his entire estate went to the special son of promise, Isaac. Abraham died when he was 175 years old and was laid to rest next to Sarah. But the story is far from over.

Isaac married Rebekah. As was the custom, she was chosen for him, but he truly loved her. Twenty years after the wedding, the couple was still childless; but in response to many prayers, Rebekah gave birth to twins. Esau, the elder brother, grew up to love the outdoors and hunting; he was his dad’s favorite. Jacob, the younger brother, was quiet and stayed at home; he was clearly his mother’s favorite. The two boys vied for the inheritance rights, and Jacob proved to be a master manipulator and schemer.

One day Esau came home famished, demanding some of the stew

Jacob was cooking. Seeing an opportunity, Jacob “sold” a meal to his brother in exchange for Esau’s birthright — the double share of inheritance due to Esau (because he was the older brother).

Sometime later, as Isaac lay in bed, weak and blind, he asked his hunter son for a tasty meal of char-grilled wild meat. After the meal, Isaac would officially pass on his blessing—and God’s favor — to Esau. This was to be Esau’s long-awaited big day.

Rebekah overheard Isaac’s plan and came up with a plan of her own. She dressed her favorite son, Jacob, in Esau’s clothes and covered his hands and neck with goatskins to resemble Esau’s hairy skin. She quickly cooked up some meat and sent Jacob, posing as Esau, into Isaac’s bedroom. Isaac, squinting his eyes and touching Jacob, wondered if this was really his hunter son. Twice deceitful Jacob lied to his aged dad. Isaac ate. After kissing his son and smelling his scent, Isaac was convinced he was talking to Esau. Then Isaac gave the blessing, also confirming the double share of the material inheritance, to Jacob, irrevocably and completely.

Soon after, Esau arrived with his own platter of grilled meat, only to discover that mom and brother had robbed him of his entire future. Angry to the point of fury, he planned to kill Jacob. Rebekah intervened once more and sent Jacob to live with relatives until Esau’s anger abated.

Forced vacations may sometimes result in pleasant surprises. In this case, Jacob fell in love with his boss’s (and uncle’s) daughter, Rachel, and worked for her family until she could become his wife. As part of the deal to marry Rachel, Jacob first had to marry her older sister, Leah. For twenty years Jacob tended flocks and farmland, and finally he took his large family home to meet Esau once again. But Jacob was careful to approach Esau with respect and humility. The wounds between them were deep and long, and he wasn’t sure if Esau was friend or foe.

Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He instructed them: “This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants. Now I am

sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.”

When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.”

Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, LORD, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”

He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, “Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds.”

He instructed the one in the lead: “When my brother Esau meets you and asks, ‘Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?’ then you are to say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.’”

He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: “You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. And be sure to say, ‘Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’” For he thought, “I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.” So Jacob’s gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in

the camp.

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants. He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. "Who are these with you?" he asked.

Jacob answered, "They are the children God has graciously given your servant."

Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down. Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

Esau asked, “What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?”

“To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said.

But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.”

“No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

Then Esau said, “Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.”

Then God said to Jacob, “Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”

So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.” So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Then they set out, and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.” So he named him Israel.

And God said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.”

Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, “Don’t despair, for you have another son.” As she breathed her last — for she was dying — she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father’s concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.

Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

God’s story of promise and prosperity moves from Jacob to his son Joseph. Of Jacob’s 12 sons, Joseph was clearly Jacob’s favorite, leading the rest of Jacob’s boys to resent their younger brother. Jacob only heightened the family stress when he gave a beautiful coat to Joseph. And Joseph didn’t help matters when he twice told his older brothers that he had a dream that they would someday bow to him. Finally, the brothers had heard enough from their arrogant little brother. They hatched a conspiracy. For seventeen-year-old Joseph, it would be a very bad day indeed.

1 Faith: Complete trust. True faith is much deeper than mere intellectual agreement with certain facts — it affects the desires of one’s heart.

2 Sovereign: This term describes the fact that God has complete

control over all things.

3 Circumcised, circumcision: A surgical removal of the foreskin of the male genitals, performed on the eighth day following birth. In the Old Testament this ritual symbolized the baby's entrance into the Hebrew community. Biblical uses of the term are often metaphorical, referring to the obedience of the heart represented by the outward symbol of circumcision.

4 Isaac: *Isaac* means "he laughs."

Jacob

*These were the sons of Jacob,
who were born to him in Paddan Aram.*

*The sons of Rachel:
Joseph and Benjamin.*

*The sons of Leah:
Issachar and Zebulun.*

*The sons of Leah's servant Zilpah:
Gad and Asher.*

*The sons of Rachel's servant Bilhah:
Dan and Naphtali.*

*The sons of Leah:
Simeon, Levi, Judah.
Reuben the firstborn.*

God bou 'n nasie

Die Here het vir Abram gesê: “Trek weg uit jou land, weg van jou familie en jou ouerhuis en gaan na die land wat Ek jou sal aanwys.

“Ek sal jou die voorvader maak van 'n groot nasie.

Ek sal jou seën

sodat jy geëerd sal wees,

en vir ander tot 'n seën sal wees.

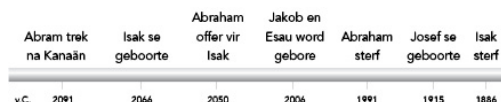
Ek sal dié seën wat jou seën

en dié wat jou vervloek, sal Ek vervloek.

In jou sal al die mense op die aarde

geseën word.”

Abram het toe weggetrek soos die HERE hom beveel het en Lot het saamgegaan. Abram was 75 jaar oud toe hy uit Haran weggetrek het. Hy het sy vrou, Sarai, sy neef Lot en al hulle besittings, asook almal wat in Haran deel van sy gesin geword het, saamgeneem Kanaän toe.



Sien "Tydlyn van DIE STORIE"

Omdat hy geglo het, het Abraham, toe God hom geroep het, gehoorsaam weggetrek na die land wat God vir hom as 'n erfdeel sou gee. Hy het weggetrek sonder om te weet waar hy sou beland.

Hulle het deur die land getrek tot by die waarsêersboom naby die plek Sigem. Die Kanaäniete het toe nog in die land gewoon. Die HERE het aan Abram verskyn en gesê: “Hierdie land gee Ek vir jou nageslag.” Toe bou Abram daar 'n altaar vir die HERE wat aan hom verskyn het.

Lot, wat saam met Abram was, het ook baie kleinvee, grootvee en tente besit. Maar Abram en Lot kon nie meer bymekaar woon nie,

want die weiveld was te klein vir hulle groot troppe vee. Hulle kon dus nie meer saam boer nie.

Nadat Lot vertrek het, sê die HERE vir Abram: “Kyk ’n bietjie rond in alle rigtings, so ver as wat jy kan sien. Die hele land wat jy sien, gaan Ek vir jou en jou nageslag as permanente eiendom gee. Ek gaan vir jou soveel afstammeling gee dat hulle, net soos die stof op die aarde, nie getel kan word nie. Kom, trek nou kruis en dwars deur die land, want Ek gee dit vir jou.”

Daarna het Abram sy kamp verskuif na die groot bome van Mamre, naby Hebron. Daar het hy ’n altaar vir die HERE gebou.

Omdat hy geglo het, het hy in die Beloofde Land gaan woon – ’n vreemdeling in ’n vreemde land. Hy het daar in tente gewoon. So ook Isak en Jakob aan wie God dieselfde belofte gemaak het. Abraham kon dit doen omdat hy uitgesien het na die stad met stewige fondamente wat God self ontwerp en gebou het.

Lot het ’n hele paar slegte besluite geneem wat hom in groot moeilikheid laat beland het. Hy het naby Sodom gaan bly. In terugskouing was dit nie ’n goeie besluit nie. Nie lank daarna nie het die konings van Sodom, Gomorra en drie ander konings in ’n oorlog betrokke geraak teen ’n vyandige weermag. Die konings van Sodom en Gomorra het verloor, en die stede is geplunder. Lot en sy gesin was onder die gyselaars.

Toe Abram die nuus hoor, roep hy 318 betroubare mans bymekaar en gaan red sy nefie. Hulle aanval in die nag het die plunderaars onkant gevang. Abram het die gyselaars bevry en die buit teruggekry. Toe hy ’n priester met die naam Melgisedek ontmoet, gee hy vir hom ’n tiende van die buit en gee die res terug aan die koning, die regmatige eienaar daarvan.

Ten spyte daarvan dat Abram al meer bewus geword het van God se krag, het daar een probleem gebly wat selfs God blykbaar nie kon oplos nie. Dit was Abram se grootste bekommernis en die hooftema van sy gesprekke met God.

Daarna het die HERE in ’n visioen aan Abram verskyn en vir hom gesê:

“Moenie bang wees nie, Abram,
want Ek sal jou beskerm

en jou beloning sal groot wees.”

Maar Abram het geantwoord: “Oppermagtige HERE, wat beteken al u seëninge as ek nie eers ’n seun het nie? Daarom sal Eliëser van Damaskus my erfgenaam word. U het my geen kinders gegee nie. Een van my slawe sal dus alles erf wat ek besit.”

Toe sê die HERE vir hom: “Nee, hy sal nie jou erfgenaam word nie. Jy sal ’n seun van jou eie hê wat al die besittings wat Ek jou gee, sal erf.” Daarop neem die HERE Abram na buite toe en sê: “Kyk op na die nagemel en tel die sterre. Kan jy hulle tel? Net so baie sal jou nageslag wees!”

Abram het op die HERE vertrou en die HERE het hom as regverdig gereken.

Teen alle hoop in het Abraham met vaste hoop geglo dat hy nog die stamvader van baie volke sou word op grond van God se belofte: “Jou nageslag sal so baie wees soos die sterre aan die hemel.” En Abraham se geloof het nie verswak nie, al het hy baie goed besef dat sy eie liggaamlike vermoëns alreeds gedaan was – hy was al omtrent 100 jaar oud – en dat sy vrou Sara nie meer kinders kon hê nie. Abraham het nie getwyfel aan God se belofte nie; intendeel, sy geloof het sterker geword en so het hy die eer aan God gegee. Hy was absoluut daarvan oortuig dat God enigiets kon doen wat Hy belooft het. Inderdaad, God het Abraham regverdig verklaar omdat hy in Hom geglo het!

Abram het geglo dat hy ’n beloofde kind van sy eie sou hê, maar sover hy en Sarai geweet het, het God nooit gespesifiseer dat Sarai die ma moet wees nie. In ’n skuif baie algemeen vir daardie tyd, het hulle besluit dat Sarai se slavin, Hagar, ’n surrogaatma vir die beloofde kind sou wees. Nadat Hagar swanger geword het, het sy en Sarai egter begin stry, en Hagar is weggestuur, hulpeloos en swanger, om in die woestyn rond te dwaal. Net toe sy begin moedeloos word, het God met haar gepraat.

Toe sê die engel van die HERE vir haar: “Gaan terug na jou meesteres toe en wees aan haar onderdanig.” Die engel van die HERE sê ook: “Ek sal vir jou ’n groot nageslag gee wat nie getel kan word nie.”

Die engel van die HERE sê toe weer vir haar:

“Jy is nou swanger met ’n seun

wat jy in die wêreld gaan bring.
Jy moet hom Ismael noem,
want die HERE het jou noodkreet gehoor.
Hierdie seun van jou sal 'n wilde mens wees,
soos 'n wilde donkie.
Hy sal teen almal wees
en almal sal teen hom wees.
Hy sal in konflik lewe met sy broers.”

Van toe af het Hagar die HERE wat met haar gepraat het, genoem “die God wat my sien”, want sy het gesê: “Ek het die Een gesien wat my gesien het!” Dit is hoekom hierdie put Lagai-Roï-fontein genoem word. Dit is nog steeds tussen Kades en Bered.

Later het Hagar vir Abram 'n seun in die wêreld gebring. Abram het hom Ismael genoem. Abram was toe 86 jaar oud toe Hagar Ismael vir hom in die wêreld gebring het.

Toe Abram 99 jaar oud was, het die HERE weer aan hom verskyn en gesê: “Ek is God die Almagtige. Lewe in my teenwoordigheid en wees opreg. Ek sal my verbond met jou maak en jy sal 'n groot nasie word.”

Toe Abram dit hoor, val hy met sy gesig op die grond. God sê toe vir hom: “Dit is my verbond wat Ek met jou sluit: Jy sal die voorsaak wees van baie nasies. Ek verander jou naam. Jy sal nie meer Abram genoem word nie, maar jy sal as Abraham bekend staan, want jy sal die voorvader wees van baie nasies. Ek sal jou talle nasate gee wat uit baie nasies sal bestaan. Daar sal ook konings uit jou nageslag voortkom. Ek sal my verbond tussen My en jou bevestig van geslag tot geslag. Dit sal vir altyd voortduur. Ek sal altyd jou God wees en ook die God van jou nageslag. Hierdie hele land Kanaän waar jy nou bly, gee Ek vir jou en jou nageslag, vir altyd. En Ek sal hulle God wees.

“Jou deel van die ooreenkoms,” sê God vir Abraham, “is om die voorwaardes van die verbond na te kom. Dit geld vir jou en al die geslagte ná jou. Dít is my verbond wat jy en jou nageslag moet onderhou: Elke manlike persoon onder julle moet besny word. Julle moet aan die voorhuid besny word. Dit is die teken van die verbond tussen My en julle.

“Elkeen wat nie besny is nie, sal afgesny word van God se belofte omdat hy die verbond verbreek het.”

Verder sê God: “Jou vrou Sarai sal nie meer so genoem word nie. Van nou af sal haar naam Sara wees. Ek sal haar seën en sy sal vir jou

'n seun in die wêreld bring. Ek sal haar beslis ryklik seën. Sy sal moeder word van baie nasies en uit haar nageslag sal daar konings voortkom.”

Die HERE het vir Sara gesorg en sy belofte aan haar nagekom. Sara het swanger geword en vir Abraham in sy ouderdom 'n seun gegee. Dit het gebeur op die bestemde tyd soos God belooft het.

Omdat hy geglo het, het Abraham, saam met Sara (wat onvrugbaar was), ook krag ontvang om 'n kind te verwek, en dit nogal in sy ouderdom, omdat hy geglo het dat God sy belofte sou nakom. En so is daar uit een mens, en dit nogal een wat nie meer 'n kind kon verwek nie, mense gebore so baie soos die sterre aan die hemelruim en so ontelbaar soos die sandkorrels op die strand.

Abraham het sy seun Isak¹ genoem. Agt dae ná Isak se geboorte het Abraham hom besny soos God hom beveel het. Abraham was toe 100 jaar oud.

Sara het gejuig: “God het my laat lag van vreugde! Almal wat dit hoor, sal saam met my lag. Wie sou ooit vir Abraham sê: Sara sal seuns borsvoed? Tog het ek op sy oudag vir Abraham 'n seun gegee!”

God het vir Abraham 'n beloofde kind gegee. Maar Abraham het alreeds 'n kind gehad by Hagar – Ismael. Wat sou van hom word?

Isak het groter geword en die dag toe hy gespeen is, het Abraham 'n groot fees gereël om die geleentheid te vier. Maar toe Sara opmerk hoe die seun van Abraham en Hagar vir Isak staan en lag, het sy by Abraham aangedring: “Raak ontslae van die slavin en haar seun! Ek sal nie toelaat dat hy, die seun van 'n slavin, die erfposisie met my seun, Isak, deel nie!”

Dit het Abraham hewig ontstel, want Ismael was tog ook sy seun. Maar God sê vir Abraham: “Moenie oor die seun en jou slavin ontsteld word nie. Doen soos Sara vra, want uit Isak sal jou nageslag voortgesit word. Ek sal egter ook die nageslag van Hagar se seun tot 'n groot nasie maak, want hy is jou seun.”

Die volgende oggend het Abraham vroeg opgestaan. Hy het padkos voorberei en 'n velsak met water oor Hagar se skouers gehang. Toe stuur hy haar en hulle seun weg. Sy het doelloos in die wildernis van Berseba rondgedwaal.

Toe die water op was, het sy die seun in die koelte van 'n bos gelos.

Sy self het 'n entjie daarvandaan gaan sit, so ver as wat 'n mens met 'n pyl en boog kan skiet. “Ek wil nie sien hoe my seun sterf nie,” het sy in trane gesê.

Maar God het die seun hoor huil. Toe roep die engel van God vir Hagar uit die hemel: “Hagar, wat is verkeerd? Moenie bang wees nie! God het die seun gehoor huil daar waar hy onder die bos lê. Gaan na hom toe en vertroos hom, want Ek gaan sy nageslag 'n groot nasie maak.”

Toe maak God Hagar se oë oop en sy sien 'n put met water. Sy het haar watersak volgemaak en vir die seun water gegee om te drink.

God was met die seun. Hy het in die Paranwoestyn grootgeword en 'n knap boogskutter geword.

Na 'n tyd wou God Abraham toets. “Abraham!” roep God.

“Hier is ek,” antwoord Abraham.

God sê vir hom: “Neem jou seun, jou enigste seun, ja, vir Isak wat jy so liefhet, en gaan na die land Moria. Offer hom daar as brandoffer op een van die berge wat Ek jou sal wys.”

Die volgende oggend het Abraham vroeg opgestaan. Hy het sy donkie opgesaal vir die reis en hout gekap vir die brandoffer. Toe het hy twee slawe en ook sy seun Isak geneem om saam te gaan. Daarna het hy vertrek na die plek wat God vir hom aangedui het. Op die derde dag sien Abraham die plek in die verte. “Bly 'n bietjie hier by die donkie,” sê Abraham vir die slawe. “Ek en die seun sal 'n entjie verder gaan. Ons sal daar aanbid en dan terugkom.”

Abraham sit toe die hout op Isak se skouers. Hy het self die mes en die vuur gedra. Terwyl die twee so saamloop, sê Isak: “Pa?”

“Ja, my seun?” antwoord Abraham.

“Ons het nou wel die hout en die vuur,” sê die seun, “maar waar is die lam vir die offerande?”

“God sal self die lam voorsien, my seun,” antwoord Abraham. So het die twee verder gestap.

Toe hulle aankom by die plek wat God vir Abraham aangewys het, bou hy daar 'n altaar en sit die hout daarop neer. Hy maak Isak vas en sit hom bo-op die hout op die altaar. Daarna vat Abraham die mes en lig dit op om sy seun as offer aan die HERE te slag. Op daardie oomblik roep die engel van die HERE na hom uit die hemel: “Abraham, Abraham!”

“Ek luister,” antwoord Abraham.

“Moenie jou hand oplig teen die seun en hom enige kwaad aandoen nie!” sê die engel. “Nou weet Ek dat jy regtig vir God dien, want jy het

selves jou geliefde seun nie van My weerhou nie.”

Abraham kyk op en sien ’n ram wat met sy horings in ’n bos vassit. Hy neem die ram en offer dit as brandoffer op die altaar in die plek van sy seun.

Omdat hy geglo het, het Abraham, toe God hom wou toets, sy seun as’t ware al klaar geoffer gehad. Ja, hy wou sy enigste kind offer – dié man wat God se beloftes ontvang het, aan wie gesê is: “Isak is die seun uit wie jou nageslag gebore sal word.” Hy het daarop gereken dat God sy kind selfs uit die dood sou kon opwek. En in ’n sekere sin hét hy hom ook uit die dood terugontvang.

Abraham het toe die plek genoem “Die HERE voorsien”. Hierdie naam het sedertdien ’n spreekwoord geword: “Op die berg van die HERE sal voorsien word.”

Die engel van die HERE roep toe weer uit die hemel na Abraham: “Die HERE sê: ‘Omdat jy My gehoorsaam het en nie eens jou geliefde seun van My weerhou het nie, neem Ek ’n eed dat Ek jou oorvloedig sal seën. Ek sal jou nageslag vermenigvuldig tot ’n ontelbare menigte, soos die sterre aan die hemel en die sand aan die see en hulle sal hulle vyande oorwin. In jou nageslag sal al die nasies van die aarde geseën word. Dit sal alles gebeur omdat jy My gehoorsaam het.’”

Uiteindelik is Sara dood. Abraham het ’n stuk grond gekoop en haar daar begrawe. Hy het heeltyd gewonder wat van hom en Isak en God se belofte sou word. Abraham het weer getrou met ’n vrou met die naam Ketura, en hulle het nog kinders gehad. Tog het hy alles nagelaat aan die spesiaal beloofde seun, Isak. Abraham is dood toe hy 175 jaar oud was en is langs Sara begrawe. Maar die storie is ver van klaar.

Isak het met Rebekka getrou. Soos gebruikelik is sy vir hom gekies, maar hy het haar werklik liefgehad. 20 jaar ná die troue was die paartjie steeds kinderloos, maar in antwoord op gebed het Rebekka geboorte gegee aan ’n tweeling. Esau, die ouer broer, het grootgeword en ’n liefde vir die buitelewe en jag ontwikkel; hy was sy pa se gunsteling. Jakob, die jonger broer, was stil en het by die huis gebly; hy was baie duidelik sy ma se gunsteling. Die twee seuns het meegeding om die geboortereg, en Jakob het ’n meester-manipuleerder en -konkelaar uitgedraai.

Eendag het Esau doodmoeg by die huis gekom en aangedring op ’n bietjie van die sop wat Jakob gemaak het. Jakob het ’n geleentheid

raakgesien en 'n maaltyd aan sy broer “verkoop” in ruil vir Esau se geboortereg – die dubbele deel wat Esau sou gekry het (omdat hy die ouer broer was).

'n Hele ruk later het Isak swak en blind in sy bed gelê. Hy vra toe vir sy jagterseun om vir hom 'n heerlike ete van gebraaide wildsvleis te maak. Ná die ete sou Isak sy seën – en God se guns – amptelik oor Esau uitspreek. Dit sou Esau se langverwagte groot dag wees.

Rebekka het Isak se plan gehoor en haar eie plan gemaak. Sy het Esau se klere vir haar gunsteling seun, Jakob, aangetrek en sy hande en nek bedek met bokvelletjies sodat hy so harig soos Esau sou voel. Sy het gou-gou vleis gaargemaak en Jakob, wat voorgegee het dat hy Esau is, na Isak toe gestuur. Isak het sy oë op skrefies getrek en aan Jakob geraak; hy het heeltyd gewonder of dit regtig sy jagterseun was. Jakob het twee keer vir sy bejaarde pa gekok. Isak het geëet. Nadat hy sy seun gesoen en sy vel geruik het, was Isak oortuig dat hy met sy seun Esau praat. Toe seën Isak hom, en bevestig ook die dubbele deel van die materiële nalatenskap aan Jakob, onherroeplik en volledig.

Nie lank daarna nie, het Esau opgedaag met sy bord gebraaide vleis, net om te ontdek dat sy ma en broer hom van sy hele toekoms beroof het. Hy was woedend en het beplan om Jakob dood te maak. Rebekka het weer tussenbeide getree en Jakob weggestuur om by familie te gaan bly totdat Esau se woede bedaar het.

Verpligte vakansies kan somtyds aangename verrassings tot gevolg hê. In hierdie geval het Jakob verlief geraak op sy baas (en oom) se dogter Ragel en vir haar gesin gewerk totdat sy sy vrou kon word. As deel van die ooreenkoms om met Ragel te trou, moes Jakob eers met haar ouer suster, Lea, trou. Vir 20 jaar het Jakob skape opgepas en lande bewerk, en uiteindelik het hy sy groot gesin huis toe geneem om weer vir Esau te ontmoet. Maar Jakob het Esau baie nederig en respekvol genader. Die wonde tussen hulle was diep, en hy was nie seker of Esau 'n vriend of vyand was nie.

Hierna stuur Jakob boodskappers na sy broer Esau in Edom, in die landstreek Seïr. Hy sê vir hulle: “Gee die volgende boodskap vir my meneer, my broer Esau: ‘Groete van u dienaar Jakob! Ek het tot onlangs by my oom Laban gewoon. Nou besit ek beeste, donkies, kleinvee en baie slawe en slavinne. Ek stuur hierdie boodskappers om Meneer in kennis te stel dat ek op pad terug is. Ek hoop dat u ons vriendelik sal ontvang.’”

Die boodskappers het teruggekom met die nuus dat hulle by Esau was. Hulle het gesê: “Esau is reeds op pad om u te ontmoet met 400

manskappe by hom!”

Jakob het baie beangs geword toe hy dié nuus hoor. Hy verdeel toe sy mense, die kleinvee, beeste en die kamele in twee groepe. Hy het gedink: “As Esau een groep aanval, kan die ander groep dalk ontsnap.”

Toe bid Jakob: “God van my oupa Abraham en my pa, Isak! HERE, U het gesê ek moet teruggaan na my land en my familie toe. U het belowe dat U vir my goed sal wees. Ek is nie al die gunste wat U vir u dienaar gedoen het, werd nie. Toe ek destyds oor die Jordaan gegaan het, het ek net ’n stapstok besit. Nou het ek hierdie twee groepe mense! HERE, red my tog asseblief uit die hand van my broer Esau. Ek is bang dat hy kom om my, my vroue en my kinders dood te maak. U het tog mos belowe om vir my goed te wees en om my nageslag te vermeerder sodat hulle so baie sal wees soos die sand by die see – te veel om te tel.”

Jakob het die nag daar oorgebly en ’n geskenk vir Esau uit sy besittings gereed gekry. Dit was 200 bokkies en twintig ramme, 200 skaapies en twintig ramme, 30 kameelkoeie met hulle kalwers, 40 koeie en tien bulle, twintig donkiemeries en tien hingste. Hy het sy slawe beveel om met hulle vooruit te trek, elke groep diere apart, geskei met ’n afstand tussen hulle. Hy het die voorste groep beveel: “Wanneer julle Esau teëkom, sal hy vra: ‘Waarheen gaan julle? Wie se slawe is julle? Wie se diere is dit hierdie?’ Dan moet julle antwoord: ‘Dit behoort aan u dienaar Jakob. Dit is ’n geskenk vir sy meester Esau! Hy kom direk agter ons aan.’”

Jakob het dieselfde bevel aan die tweede en die derde groep gegee – en aan elkeen wat saam met ’n trop diere getrek het. “Julle moet elkeen so vir Esau sê: ‘U dienaar Jakob kom direk agter ons aan.’” Jakob se plan was om Esau met die geskenke te paai voordat hulle mekaar ontmoet. “Dalk sal hy dan in ’n goeie bui wees,” het Jakob gehoop. So is die geskenke vooruit gestuur, maar Jakob het die aand in die kamp agtergebly.

Gedurende die nag het Jakob opgestaan en sy twee vroue, twee slavinne en elf seuns geneem en hulle deur die Jabbokdrif gestuur. Nadat hy hulle na die oorkant toe laat gaan het, stuur hy ook al sy besittings deur. Hy het daar alleen agtergebly. ’n Man het gekom en met hom gestoei tot dagbreek toe. Toe die man sien dat hy hom nie kon onderkry nie het hy Jakob op sy heup geslaan sodat dit uit die potjie spring. Toe sê die man: “Los my nou, die dag begin al breek.”

Uitasem sê Jakob: “Ek sal jou net laat gaan as jy my seën.”

“Wat is jou naam?” vra die man.

Hy antwoord: “Jakob.”

“Jou naam sal nie meer Jakob wees nie,” sê die man vir hom. “Van nou af is dit Israel, want jy het met God en mens geworstel en nie kopgegee nie.”

“Wat is jǒú naam dan?” vra Jakob hom.

“Hoekom vra jy wat my naam is?” antwoord die man. Toe seën hy Jakob net daar. Jakob het die plek Pniël genoem, want hy het gesê: “Ek het God in die gesig gekyk. Tog is my lewe gespaar.”

Toe Jakob opkyk, sien hy vir Esau en sy 400 man aankom. Jakob verdeel toe die kinders tussen Lea, Ragel en die twee slavin vroue. Hy plaas sy twee slavin vroue met hulle kinders heel voor, Lea en haar kinders agter hulle en heel laaste Ragel en Josef. Jakob self het heel voor gaan staan en sewe keer laag voor Esau gebuig.

Maar Esau het aangehardloop gekom, hom om die nek geval en hom gesoen. Albei was in trane. Esau kyk toe na die vroue en kinders en vra: “Wie is hierdie mense saam met jou?”

“Dit is die kinders wat God in sy goedheid aan u dienaar gegee het,” antwoord Jakob.

Eers kom die slavin vroue en hulle kinders nader en buig voor hom. Toe kom Lea met haar kinders en buig ook voor hom. Laaste kom Ragel en Josef en doen dieselfde.

“En wat is jou bedoeling met al daardie goed wat ek gekry het?” vra Esau.

“Dit is geskenke om u goeie guns te wen, my heer,” antwoord Jakob.

“My broer, ek besit self baie,” sê Esau. “Laat wat aan jou behoort, joune bly.”

“Nee, asseblief! Neem dit terwyl u my so goedgesind is,” sê Jakob. “Dis asof ek die glimlag van God sien. Neem asseblief die geskenke, want God was baie goed vir my. Ek het meer as genoeg vir myself.” Jakob het só daarop aangedring dat hy dit moes neem, dat Esau dit uiteindelik aanvaar het.

“Nou moet ons gaan,” sê Esau. “Ek sal julle vergesel.”

God sê toe vir Jakob: “Trek verder en gaan woon by Bet-El. Bou daar vir My ’n altaar. Ek is die God wat aan jou verskyn het toe jy destyds weggevlug het van jou broer Esau af.”

Jakob beveel toe almal in sy huishouding: “Raak ontslae van julle afgodsbeelde, was julle en trek skoon klere aan. Ons gaan nou na Bet-El toe waar ek ’n altaar wil bou tot eer van die God wat my gebede

verhoor het toe ek in die verknorsing was. Hy was oral by my waar ek gegaan het.” Hulle gee toe al hulle afgodsbeelde en oorringe vir Jakob. Hy het dit onder die boom naby Sigem begrawe. Terwyl hulle wegtrek, het daar so ’n verskrikking van God oor die mense van die omgewing gekom dat niemand eers gewaag het om Jakob en sy seuns te agtervolg nie.

Jakob-hulle het by Lus, nou Bet-El genoem, in Kanaän aangekom. Daar bou hy ’n altaar en noem dit El-Bet-El, want God het hier by Bet-El aan hom verskyn toe hy vir Esau gevlug het.

Na Jakob se terugkeer uit Paddan-Aram het God weer ’n keer aan hom verskyn. God het hom geseën en gesê: “Jou naam is nie langer Jakob nie. Jy sal van nou af Israel genoem word.”

God het verder gesê: “Ek is God die Almagtige. Wees vrugbaar en word ’n groot nasie. Baie nasies sal uit jou voortkom. Daar sal selfs konings onder hulle wees. Hierdie land wat Ek vir Abraham en Isak gegee het, gee Ek ook vir jou en jou nageslag.”

Hulle het Bet-El verlaat op pad na Efrata toe, dit is Betlehem. Toe hulle nog ’n ent van hulle bestemming was, was dit Ragel se tyd om geboorte te gee. Dit was ’n baie moeilike bevalling. Toe sy so swaarkry met die bevalling, sê die vroedvrou vir haar: “Moenie bang wees nie. Jy het weer ’n seun!” Maar Ragel was besig om te sterf. Met haar laaste asem noem sy hom Ben-Oni. Sy pa het hom egter Benjamin genoem.

Ragel het gesterf en hulle het haar op pad na Efrata, dit is Betlehem, begrawe.

Terwyl hulle in daardie landstreek was, het Ruben by Bilha, sy pa se slavin vrou, geslaap. Jakob het hiervan te hore gekom.

Jakob is toe na sy pa, Isak, in Mamre. Dit is naby Kirjat-Arba, nou genoem Hebron, waar Abraham destyds gewoon het. Isak het 180 jaar oud geword. Hy is ná ’n vol lewe op ’n rype ouderdom oorlede. Sy twee seuns, Esau en Jakob, het hom begrawe.

God se verhaal van belofte en voorspoed word van Jakob oorgedra na sy seun Josef. Van Jakob se twaalf seuns was Josef baie duidelik sy gunsteling, wat daartoe gelei het dat die res van Jakob se seuns wrewelrig gevoel het teenoor hulle jonger broer. Jakob het net groter onmin veroorsaak deur vir Josef ’n pragtige kleding te gee. En Josef het ook nie veel gehelp toe hy twee keer vir sy broers vertel het dat hy in

'n droom gesien het hoe hulle voor hom buig nie. Uiteindelik het die broers genoeg gehad van hulle arrogante kleinboet. Hulle het 'n komplot gesmee. Vir die sewentienjarige Josef sou dit inderdaad 'n baie slegte dag wees.

¹Isak beteken “hy lag”.



3

Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

NOW HIS BROTHERS had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem, and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

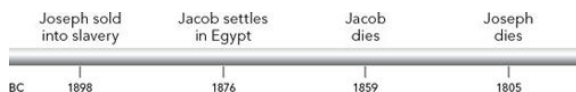
When Joseph arrived at Shechem, a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

He replied, “I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?”

“They have moved on from here,” the man answered. “I heard them say, ‘Let’s go to Dothan.’”

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. “Come now, let’s kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”



When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. “Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe — the ornate robe he was wearing — and they took him and threw him into the cistern. The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?”

Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.”

He recognized it and said, “It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.”

Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.” So his father wept for him.

Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph’s care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!”

But he refused. “With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am.

My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

Joseph's administrative skills surfaced both in the house of his Egyptian master and in jail. Joseph also cultivated another talent while confined to Pharaoh's stinking prison: God gifted him with the unusual ability to discern the meaning of dreams. Once during his confinement, Joseph helped two of Pharaoh's civil servants interpret their dreams. When Pharaoh's dream life took a bizarre turn, Joseph was summoned to the royal court.

When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream.

In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

"I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

Pharaoh explained his two dreams this way: Seven beautiful, fat cows emerge from the Nile only to be eaten by seven ugly, skinny cows; then seven savory heads of grain on a single stalk are swallowed up by seven dried up, worthless heads. "What do you make of that?" Pharaoh asked Joseph.

Giving credit to God for this gift of interpretation, Joseph told Pharaoh that the twin dreams foretold seven years of bumper crops to be followed by seven years of dried up fields and famine. God planned it this way, Joseph said, so there could be no doubt it would happen.

Joseph's recommendation to Pharaoh was to put a wise man in charge of storing food and preparing for the coming famine.

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. He had him ride in a chariot as his

second-in-command, and people shouted before him, “Make way!” Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.”

Sure enough, for seven wonderful years Egyptian farmers could hardly believe how full their harvests were. Farms yielded enough for the people to eat well and still store up for the coming bad times. Joseph knew another kind of fruitfulness during this time: his wife had two sons. He gave them the names Manasseh¹ and Ephraim.² Then, as Joseph had predicted, the blue skies over Egypt became hot and parched; the crops withered. But Joseph had already planned ahead and stored a sufficient supply of food to keep the Egyptians healthy and Pharaoh’s foreign trade business even healthier.

Even the weather patterns fit into God’s bigger plan. Because the drought was so severe, neighboring nations began to approach Egypt for help just to stay alive. And just look who shows up.

When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you just keep looking at each other?” He continued, “I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.”

Then ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him.

Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. “Where do you come from?” he asked.

“From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.”

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

“No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy

food. We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”

“No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.”

Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies! And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!” And he put them all in custody for three days.

On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This they proceeded to do.

They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.”

Reuben replied, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.” They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

Joseph developed a deceitful plan: He imprisoned one of his brothers, Simeon, as a supposed “hostage” until his absent younger brother Benjamin could appear in Egypt; he secretly returned the

money used to purchase their grain to the brothers' bags; he kept his own identity from them by using his second language, all the while hearing perfectly well their own expressed fears.

These ten brothers were desperately confused.

But father Jacob wasn't confused at all. When the ten sons told him the terms of sale, Jacob wouldn't budge. No way would he surrender the young Benjamin to this Egyptian leader's examination, or even to the sorry band of sons who had allegedly lost Joseph to a wild beast so many years before.

It looked like a stalemate—stubborn souls refusing to confront their secret fears—until hunger, that great persuader, drove them toward compromise and compliance.

Now the famine was still severe in the land. So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go back and buy us a little more food.”

But Judah said to him, “The man warned us solemnly, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.’”

Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift — a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds.

“Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”

So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph.

When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. He asked them how they were, and then he said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?”

They replied, “Your servant our father is still alive and well.” And they bowed down, prostrating themselves before him.

As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother’s son, he asked, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.” Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, “Serve the food.”

The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said.

As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, “Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil? Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.’”

When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. But they said to him, “Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master’s house? If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves.”

“Very well, then,” he said, “let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame.”

Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"

"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied. "What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves — we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."

But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

Then Judah went up to him and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself.

"Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.'

"So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. Your servant guaranteed the boy's safety to my father. I said, 'If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!'

"Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father."

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me — you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

"You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. They told him, "Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt." Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. But when

they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. And Israel said, “I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, “Jacob! Jacob!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“I am God, the God of your father,” he said. “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes.”

Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel’s sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him.

Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen. When they arrived in the region of Goshen, Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.

Israel said to Joseph, “Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive.”

So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh directed.

Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried.”

“I will do as you say,” he said.

“Swear to me,” he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers.”

Jacob died at the ripe age of 147 years. Before that last day, he gathered his sons to bless them, pronounce their future and give them ongoing responsibilities. Not all the sons got what they wanted. Reuben, for example, was chastised for an earlier sexual sin that no doubt he had hoped his father would not remember. Jacob’s last words foretold that some of his sons and their descendants would experience success, others hard times. Jacob adopted Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own; this allowed Jacob to give Joseph a double inheritance as one whose character had earned his trust and confidence.

When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?” So they sent word to Joseph, saying, “Your father left these instructions before he died: ‘This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.’ Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said.

But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father’s family. He lived a hundred and ten years and saw the third generation of Ephraim’s children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph’s knees.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”

So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

1 **‘Manasseh:** *Manasseh* sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for “forget.”

2 **‘Ephraim:** *Ephraim* sounds like the Hebrew for “twice fruitful.”

Josef:

Van slaaf tot onderkoning

Josef se broers het gegaan om die vee in die omgewing van Sigem te laat wei. Toe hulle vir 'n tyd lank weg was, sê Jakob vir Josef: “Jou broers is met die vee daar anderkant by Sigem. Ek wil jou na hulle toe stuur.”

“Goed, Pa,” sê Josef.

“Gaan kyk hoe dit met jou broers en die vee gaan,” sê Jakob. “Kom dan terug en vertel vir my.” Jakob was in die vallei van Hebron toe hy hom gestuur het.

Josef het gegaan en in Sigem aangekom. Iemand het hom gesien terwyl hy daar rondloop. “Waarna soek jy?” vra hy.

“Ek soek my broers en hulle troppe vee,” antwoord Josef. “Het jy hulle dalk gesien?”

“Ja,” antwoord die man, “maar hulle is nie meer hier nie. Ek het gehoor jou broers sê hulle gaan na Dotan toe.”

Josef is na Dotan toe en het hulle daar gekry. Toe sy broers hom sien aankom, het hulle hom van ver af herken en planne beraam om hom dood te maak.



“Hier kom daardie dromer!” het hulle uitgeroep. “Kom ons maak hom dood en gooi hom in ’n diep put. Ons kan ons pa vertel dat ’n wilde dier hom opgevreet het. Dan sal ons sien wat word van sy drome!”

Maar Ruben het vir hom in die bres getree. “Ons moenie hom doodmaak nie,” sê hy. “Hoekom sal ons bloed vergiet? Kom ons gooi hom lewendig in hierdie put in die woestyn. Dan sal hy sterf sonder dat ons hom self doodgemaak het.” Ruben het stilletjies beplan om

Josef te help ontsnap en hom dan na sy pa terug te stuur.

Toe Josef daar aankom, het hulle hom sy spoggerige kleeed laat uittrek en hom in die put gegooi. Dit was op daardie tydstip kurkdroog.

Net toe hulle gaan sit om te eet, sien hulle 'n klomp kamele in die verte in hulle rigting aankom. Dit was 'n groep Ismaelitiese handelaars wat gom, balsem en hars vanaf Gilead na Egipte toe neem.

Sy ander broer Juda sê toe vir die ander: “Watter voordeel is daar vir ons om ons broer dood te maak en dit geheim te hou? Kom ons verkoop Josef aan daardie Ismaelitiese handelaars. Ons moenie vir sy dood verantwoordelik wees nie. Per slot van rekening is hy ons broer!” Sy broers het saamgestem.

Toe die handelaars by hulle verbykom, trek die broers vir Josef op uit die put. Daarna verkoop hulle hom vir twintig stukke silwer. Die Ismaelitiese handelaars het hom saamgeneem Egipte toe.

Toe Ruben later terugkom om Josef uit die put te haal, was Josef nie meer daar nie. Hy skeur sy klere en gaan terug na sy broers toe en roep uit: “Die seun is weg! Wat kan ek nou doen?”

Josef se broers slag toe 'n bokkie en druk die kleeed in sy bloed. Daarna stuur hulle die bloedbesmeerde kleeed na hulle pa toe. “Ons het dit in die veld gekry,” sê hulle. “Is dit nie dalk Josef s'n nie?”

Hulle pa het dit dadelik herken. “Ja,” sê hy. “Dit is my seun se kleeed. Dis seker 'n wilde dier wat hom gevang en opgevreet het. Josef is sekerlik verskeur!”

Toe skeur Jakob sy klere en trek rouklere aan. Hy het baie dae lank oor sy seun getreur. Sy gesin het hom probeer troos, maar dit het niks gehelp nie. “Ek sal al treurende oor my seun graf toe gaan!” het hy gesê. Hy was diep bedroef.

Intussen het die handelaars Josef in Egipte aan Potifar verkoop, 'n beampte van die farao, die koning van Egipte. Potifar was die hoof van die farao se lyfwag.

Die Ismaelitiese handelaars het vir Josef Egipte toe gebring. Daar het Potifar, 'n amptenaar van die farao en hoof van die lyfwag, hom by hulle gekoop.

Die HERE was met Josef sodat dit met hom goed gegaan het in die huis van sy Egiptiese meester. Toe Potifar dit raaksien en besef die HERE is met Josef aangesien hy suksesvol was in alles wat hy doen, was Potifar hom goedgesind. Hy het Josef as sy persoonlike sekretaris aangestel en sy hele huishouding en selfs sy saketransaksies aan hom toevertrou. Van toe af het die HERE Potifar geseën ter wille van Josef.

Die huishouding het glad verloop en sy boerdery het vooruitgegaan. Daarom het Potifar hom aangestel oor alles wat hy besit. Met Josef aan die stuur het hy geen bekommernisse gehad nie, behalwe om te besluit wat hy wou eet!

Josef was goed gebou en baie aantreklik. Ná sy bevordering het Potifar se vrou met begeerte na hom begin kyk. Sy het hom genooi om by haar te kom slaap.

Maar Josef het geweier. “Kyk,” sê hy vir haar, “my meester vertrou my met alles in sy hele huishouding. Niemand het meer gesag daaroor as ek nie. Hy het niks van my weerhou nie, behalwe u, omdat u sy vrou is. Hoe kan ek ooit so ’n slegte ding doen? Ek sal mos teen God oortree.” Sy het dag na dag druk op hom uitgeoefen, maar hy het volhard om nie toe te gee aan haar versoeke nie. Hy het selfs sover moontlik uit haar pad probeer bly.

Eendag was hy besig om sy werk te doen terwyl daar niemand anders in die huis was nie. Sy kom toe en gryp hom aan sy klere en eis van hom: “Kom slaap by my!” Josef het hom losgeskeur, maar in die proses die kledingstuk waaraan sy hom gegryp het, agtergelaat en uit die huis gehardloop.

Toe sy sien dat sy ’n stuk van sy klere in haar hand vashou en dat hy gevlug het, begin sy skree. Almal in die huis kom toe aangehardloop. “My man het hierdie Hebreuse slaaf hier gebring om ons te beledig!” het sy gesnik. “Hy het my probeer verkrag, maar ek het geskree. Toe hy hoor hoe ek om hulp roep, het hy weggehardloop, maar hierdie kledingstuk by my agtergelaat.”

Sy het die kledingstuk by haar gehou totdat haar man weer tuisgekom het. Sy sê toe vir hom: “Daardie Hebreuse slaaf wat jy hier ingebring het, het probeer om by my aan te lê. Gelukkig het ek geskree. Toe hardloop hy hier uit, maar het sy kleed agtergelaat!”

Nadat Potifar sy vrou se storie gehoor het oor wat hy met haar probeer aanvang het, was hy briesend. Hy gryp Josef en gooi hom in die tronk waar die koning se gevangenes gehou word.

Terwyl hy daar in die tronk was, was die HERE ook met Josef. Hy het sy getrouheid aan Josef bewys deurdat die tronkbewaarder hom goedgesind was. Spoedig het die tronkbewaarder Josef oor die ander gevangenes aangestel en oor alles wat in die tronk moes gebeur. Die tronkbewaarder het geen bekommernis gehad nie, want Josef het oor alles toesig gehou. Die HERE was met hom sodat hy suksesvol was in alles wat hy gedoen het.

Josef se administratiewe vaardighede het in beide sy Egiptiese meester

en die tronk na vore gekom. Josef het nog 'n talent ontwikkel terwyl hy in Farao se stinkende tronk gesit het: God het vir hom die ongewone vermoë gegee om drome uit te lê. Gedurende sy tyd in die tronk het Josef twee van die farao se werknemers gehelp om hulle drome uit te lê. Toe Farao se drome snaakse draaie begin maak, is Josef na die troonsaal ontbied.

Twee jaar later het die farao gedroom.

Die volgende oggend het die farao hom bekommer oor wat die drome sou beteken. Hy roep toe al die waarsêers en wyse manne van Egipte en vertel hulle van sy drome. Maar niemand kon die drome uitleë nie.

Die farao het Josef dadelik laat roep. Hulle het hom haastig uit die tronk gehaal, hom geskeer en ander klere laat aantrek. Toe het hy voor die farao verskyn.

“Ek het laas nag 'n droom gehad,” vertel die farao, “maar niemand kon dit vir my verklaar nie. Ek hoor jy kan drome uitleë.”

“Nee, ek kan nie!” antwoord Josef. “Maar God kan die verklaring gee.”

Farao het sy twee drome só verduidelik: Sewe pragtige, vet koeie het uit die Nyl te voorskyn gekom net om deur sewe lelike, maer koeie opgeëet te word. Toe is sewe vet are aan 'n stingel ingesluk deur sewe droë, verskrompelde are. “Hoe verklaar jy dit?” het die farao vir Josef gevra.

Josef het aan God al die eer vir sy interpretasie gegee en toe vir die farao vertel dat beide drome dieselfde beteken. Daar sal sewe jaar van baie groot oeste wees; waarna daar sewe jaar van groot droogte en hongersnood sal wees. God het dit so beplan, het Josef gesê, dus kan daar geen twyfel wees dat dit sal gebeur nie.

Josef het die farao aangeraai om 'n wyse man in beheer te plaas van die opgaar van kos en die voorbereiding vir die hongersnood.

Die farao en sy raadgewers was in hulle skik met Josef se voorstel.

Hy draai hom toe na Josef toe en sê: “God het die betekenis van hierdie drome aan jou bekendgemaak. Niemand is ook nog so wys en verstandig soos jy nie! Ek stel jou aan oor die projek en oor die paleis. Jy sal oor al my onderdane gesag hê. Net ek sal meer mag as jy hê.”

Die farao sê verder vir Josef: “Hiermee stel ek jou aan oor die hele Egipte.” Toe haal die farao sy seëlring af en steek dit aan Josef se vinger as teken van sy gesag. Hy het vir hom klere van fyn linne laat aantrek en ’n goue ketting om sy nek gehang. Die farao het ook sy tweede beste wa vir hom gegee. Oral waar hy gegaan het, het hulle voor hom uitgeroep: “Eer hom! Eer hom!” Op hierdie manier is Josef oor die hele Egipte aangestel.

Die farao sê vir Josef: “Ek is die koning, maar niemand sal in die ganse Egipte ’n vinger verroer of ’n voet versit sonder jou goedkeuring nie.”

Werklikwaar, vir sewe wonderlike jare kon die Egiptiese boere skaars glo hoe groot hulle oeste was. Die plase het genoeg geproduseer om die mense goed te voed en nog te stoor vir die komende slegte tye. Josef het ’n ander vrugbaarheid in hierdie tyd ervaar: sy vrou het twee seuns gehad. Hy het hulle Manasse en Efraim genoem. Net soos Josef voorspel het, het die blou lug bokant Egipte warm en droog geword; die oeste het verskrompel. Maar Josef het reeds vooruit beplan en ’n groot genoeg kosvoorraad gestoor om die Egiptenare en die farao se buitelandse handel selfs nog gesonder te hou.

Selfs die weerpatrone het in God se groter plan ingepas. Omdat die droogte so erg was, het nabygeleë nasies vir Egipte genader om hulle te help om net te oorleef. En kyk net wie daag op.

Jakob het gehoor dat daar in Egipte graan te koop was. Hy sê toe vir sy seuns: “Hoekom staan en kyk julle vir mekaar? Ek het gehoor daar is graan in Egipte. Gaan soontoe en koop vir ons daarvan sodat ons kan oorleef, anders sal ons van die honger doodgaan.”

Josef se tien oudste broers het toe na Egipte vertrek om daar graan te gaan koop. Jakob het geweier dat Josef se jonger broer, Benjamin, saamgaan omdat hy bang was hy kom iets oor.

Josef was in beheer van die hele Egipte. Hy het ook die graanverkope behartig. Daarom het sy broers na hom toe gegaan. Hulle het diep voor hom gebuig. Josef het hulle dadelik herken, maar hom as ’n vreemdeling voorgedoen. “Van waar is julle?” het hy kortaf gevra.

“Van die land Kanaän,” antwoord hulle. “Ons het gekom om graan te koop.”

Josef het hulle wel herken, maar hulle het hom nie herken nie. Dit het hom dadelik laat dink aan die drome van jare gelede. Hy sê vir

hulle: “Julle is spioene! Julle het kom kyk waar ons land kwesbaar is.”

“Nee, Meneer, ons is u dienaars!” sê hulle. “Ons het maar net gekom om kos te koop. Ons is almal broers en eerlike mense, Meneer! Ons is nie spioene nie!”

“Nee, julle is!” hou Josef vol. “Julle het gekom om te kyk waar die land ingeval kan word.”

“Meneer,” sê hulle, “ons was twaalf broers, seuns van een pa wat in die land Kanaän woon. Ons jongste broer is daar by ons pa, maar een van ons broers leef nie meer nie.”

Maar Josef hou steeds vol: “Nee, julle is spioene! Kyk, ek sal julle storie toets. So waar as Farao leef, julle sal Egipte nie verlaat voordat julle jongste broer hierheen gekom het nie. Een van julle moet julle broer gaan haal. Ek sal die ander hier in die tronk aanhou. Dan sal ek kan vasstel of julle storie waar is of nie. As dit blyk dat julle nie ’n jonger broer het nie, sal ek weet julle is spioene.” Toe stuur hy hulle almal vir drie dae tronk toe.

Op die derde dag sê Josef vir hulle: “Ek dien God. As julle maak soos ek sê, sal julle lewe. As julle werklik eerlike mense is, sal een van julle in die tronk agterbly. Die ander kan egter huis toe gaan met die kos vir julle gesinne. Maar julle moet julle jongste broer volgende keer saambring. So sal ek weet of julle die waarheid praat. As julle dit doen, sal ek julle lewens spaar.” Hulle het dié reëling aanvaar.

Die broers het toe onder mekaar gepraat: “Dit het alles gebeur oor wat ons lank gelede aan Josef gedoen het. Ons het sy angs en benoudheid gesien en gehoor hoe hy gesmeek het, maar ons het ons doof gehou. Dis hoekom hierdie moeilikheid nou oor ons kom.”

“Het ek nie vir julle gesê om dit nie te doen nie?” sê Ruben. “Maar julle wou mos nie luister nie. Nou gaan ons almal sterf omdat ons hom vermoor het.” Hulle het natuurlik nie geweet Josef verstaan alles wat hulle gesê het nie, want hy het deur ’n tolk met hulle gepraat.

Josef het dadelik omgedraai weg van hulle af, want hy kon nie sy trane bedwing nie. Hy het weer na hulle toe teruggegaan en voor hulle oë vir Simeon laat boei en tronk toe gestuur.

Josef het ’n bedrieglike plan gemaak: hy het een van sy broers, Simeon, in die tronk gegooi as ’n sogenaamde “gyselaar” totdat sy afwesige jonger boetie, Benjamin, na Egipte sou kom; hy het die geld wat hulle gebruik het om die graan mee te betaal in die geheim teruggesit in sy broers se sakke; hy het sy identiteit van hulle geheim gehou deur in sy tweede taal te praat terwyl hy duidelik kon verstaan hoe bevrees hulle was.

Hierdie tien broers was baie verward.

Maar hulle pa, Jakob, was glad nie verward nie. Toe die broers vir hom vertel wat Josef se voorwaardes was, het hy geweier om toe te gee. Hy sou onder geen omstandighede die jong Benjamin blootstel aan die Egiptiese leier of aan die seuns wat klaarblyklik vir Josef baie jare gelede aan 'n wilde dier verloor het nie.

Dit het soos 'n skaakmat-situasie gelyk – koppige siele wat geweier het om hulle eie geheime vrese te konfronteer – totdat honger, die groot oorreder, hulle na 'n kompromie en insiklikheid gedryf het.

Daar was geen verligting van die vreeslike hongersnood wat in die gebied geheers het nie. Toe die graan wat hulle van Egipte af gebring het, begin opraak, het Jakob vir sy seuns gesê: “Gaan terug en koop weer vir ons 'n bietjie kos.”

Maar Juda sê: “Pa, die man het ons ernstig gewaarsku: ‘Ek wil julle nie weer sien as julle broer nie saamkom nie.’”

Uiteindelik het Jakob toegegee: “As dit nie anders kan nie, gaan dan maar. Julle moet julle sakke vol maak met die beste wat ons land het en neem vir die man 'n geskenk: 'n bietjie balsem, 'n bietjie heuning, gom, hars, neute en amandels.

“Vat nou julle broer en gaan terug na die man toe. Mag God Almagtig julle genadig wees wanneer julle by die man aankom en mag hy Simeon vrylaat en Benjamin terugstuur. As ek dan van kinders beroof moet word, moet ek maar beroof word.”

Die mans vat toe die geskenke, dubbel die hoeveelheid geld én vir Benjamin en gaan Egipte toe en meld hulle by Josef aan.

Toe Josef inkom, gee hulle hom die geskenke en buig laag voor hom. Hy vra hoe dit met hulle gaan en voeg by: “En hoe gaan dit met julle pa, die ou man van wie julle gepraat het? Lewe hy nog?”

“Ja,” antwoord hulle. “U dienaar, ons pa, leef nog en dit gaan goed met hom.” Hulle buig toe weer voor hom.

Toe hy opkyk, sien hy sy bloedbroer Benjamin raak. Hy vra toe: “Is dit julle jongste broer, die een van wie julle gepraat het? Mag God jou seën, my seun.” Toe kon hy sy trane oor Benjamin nie meer bedwing nie en het haastig die vertrek verlaat. Hy het na 'n aparte vertrek gegaan om daar te gaan huil.

Nadat hy sy gesig gewas het, het hy teruggekom. Met sy emosies nou onder beheer, het hy beveel: “Bring die kos!”

Josef het vir sy broers hulle plekke aangewys. Tot hulle verbasing was dit in volgorde van hulle ouderdomme, van die oudste tot die jongste. Hulle kos is vanaf Josef se tafel bedien. Die grootste porsie het hy aan Benjamin gegee. Dit was vyf keer groter as dié van die ander. Hulle het toe saam met Josef wyn gedrink en daarvan vrolik geword.

Toe die broers gereed was om te gaan, gee Josef bevel aan die bestuurder van sy huis: “Maak al die sakke vol met soveel graan moontlik en sit elke man se geld weer terug in sy sak. My silwerbeker moet jy bo in die sak van die jongste een sit saam met die geld wat hy vir die graan betaal het.” Die bestuurder het net so gemaak soos Josef beveel het.

Teen dagbreek was die broers op en begin hulle die terugtog met hulle donkies. Hulle was skaars buite die stad, toe sê Josef vir die bestuurder: “Jaag agter hulle aan en stop hulle. Vra hulle: ‘Hoekom het julle ’n goeie daad met kwaad vergeld? Waarom het julle my meester se persoonlike silwerbeker gesteel waarmee hy die toekoms voorspel? Dis ’n slegte ding wat julle gedoen het!’”

Die bestuurder het hulle ingehaal en gemaak soos hy beveel is. “Waarvan praat u, Meneer?” sê die broers. “Nie een van ons sal so iets aanvang nie. Het ons dan nie die geld wat ons ’n vorige keer in ons sakke gekry het al die pad van Kanaän af weer teruggebring nie? Hoekom sou ons silwer of goud uit u meester se huis steel? As u die beker by enigeen van ons kry, moet daardie een doodgemaak word en ons sal u meester se slawe word.”

“Dis goed so,” antwoord die bestuurder, “behalwe dat net die een wat dit gesteel het my slaaf sal wees. Die onskuldiges mag maar vrygaan.”

Hulle het gou die sakke van die donkies afgelaai en dit oopgemaak. Hy het by die oudste se sak begin soek en so voortgegaan tot by die jongste. En daar kry hy toe die beker in Benjamin se sak! Toe hulle dit sien, skeur hulle hulle klere in radeloosheid. Hulle laai weer hulle donkies en draai terug na die stad toe.

Josef was nog tuis toe Juda en sy broers daar aankom en op die grond voor hom neerval. “Wat het julle aangevang?” vra Josef. “Het julle nie geweet dat ’n persoon soos ek sou weet wie dit gesteel het nie?”

Juda sê toe: “Ai, Meneer, wat kan ons tog vir u sê? Hoe kan ons onself verontskuldig? God het ons sonde aan die lig gebring. Meneer, ons het almal teruggekom om u slawe te wees, ons én ons broer in wie

se sak die beker gekry is.”

“Nee,” sê Josef. “Net die man wat die beker gesteel het, sal my slaaf wees. Die ander kan maar teruggaan na julle pa toe.”

Juda kom toe vorentoe en sê: “Meneer, laat ek asseblief iets sê. Moet tog nie vir my kwaad word nie. Ek weet dat u dieselfde gesag het as Farao.

“Ons pa het vir ons gesê: ‘Julle weet dat my vrou twee seuns gehad het en dat een van hulle weggegaan het en nie weer teruggekom het nie. Ek dink roofdiere het hom verskeur, want ek het hom nog nie weer gesien nie. As julle nou sy broer ook van my wegneem en hy kom iets oor, sal julle my in my ouderdom met smart graf toe laat gaan.’

“Nou, Meneer, ek durf nie sonder die seun na my pa toe teruggaan nie. Ons pa is baie lief vir die seun. As hy sien dat die seun nie by ons is nie, sal ons pa sterf. Ons sal veroorsaak dat hy in sy ouderdom met smart in die graf gaan. Meneer, ek het my pa gewaarborg dat ek na die seun sal kyk. Ek het vir hom gesê: ‘As ek hom nie terugbring nie, sal ek vir altyd skuldig wees teenoor Pa.’

“Asseblief, Meneer, laat my hier agterbly as u slaaf in die plek van die seun en laat hy saam met sy broers teruggaan. Hoe sou ek sonder die seun na my pa toe kon teruggaan? Ek kan dit nie verduur om daaraan te dink dat ek hom soveel smart sal aandoen nie.”

Toe kon Josef dit nie meer voor al sy personeel uithou nie. “Gaan uit, almal van julle!” beveel hy hulle. Daar was niemand anders teenwoordig toe Josef hom aan sy broers bekendstel nie. Toe bars hy in trane uit. Hy het so hard gehuil dat die Egiptenaars dit gehoor het en ook die mense in die farao se paleis.

“Ek is Josef!” sê hy vir sy broers. “Leef Pa nog?” Maar sy broers was stomgeslaan, want hulle het baie bang geword.

“Kom nader na my toe,” sê hy. Hulle kom toe nader. Hy sê toe weer: “Ek is Josef, julle broer wat julle destyds verkoop het en na Egipte toe gebring is. Maar moenie julleself verwyt dat julle dit gedoen het nie. Eintlik is dit God wat dit bewerk het. Hy het my vooruit gestuur sodat julle lewens gespaar kon word. Twee jaar hongersnood is verby, maar daar lê nog vyf jaar voor. In dié tyd sal daar nie geploeg en geoes kan word nie. God het my voor julle uit gestuur om voorsorg te tref dat julle en julle gesinne aan die lewe kan bly en sodat julle ’n groot nasie kan word. Ja, dit is God wat my gestuur het en nie julle nie! Hy het gesorg dat ek as Farao se raadgewer aangestel word, en ook as bestuurder van sy hele

huishouding en heerser oor die hele Egipte.

“Maak nou gou. Gaan terug na my pa toe en sê vir hom: ‘Dit is wat Pa se seun Josef sê: God het my heerser van die hele Egipte gemaak. Kom dadelik hierheen! Pa kan in die streek van Gosen woon sodat Pa naby my kan wees saam met Pa se kinders en kleinkinders, kleinvee en grootvee en alles wat Pa besit. Ek sal daar vir Pa sorg, want daar is nog vyf jaar hongersnood oor. Anders sal Pa en almal saam met Pa totaal verarm.’”

Josef sê verder: “Julle kan nou self sien, en ook my broer Benjamin kan sien, dit is regtig ek, julle broer Josef wat met julle praat! Gaan vertel my pa hoe geëerd ek in Egipte is. Vertel hom wat julle alles gesien het en bring hom so gou moontlik hiernatoe.”

Terwyl hy huil van vreugde, omhels hy vir Benjamin, wat ook begin huil het. Daarna het Josef elkeen van sy broers omhels en by hulle gehuil. Toe eers het hulle met hom begin praat.

Hulle is daar weg en het by hulle pa, Jakob, in die land Kanaän aangekom. “Josef lewe nog!” sê hulle vir hom. “Hy is die heerser van die hele land Egipte!” Jakob was oorbluf deur hierdie nuus. Hy kon dit net nie glo nie. Maar toe hulle Josef se boodskappe oordra, en toe hy die waens sien wat Josef gestuur het om hom te kom haal, het hy tot verhaal gekom. Toe sê Jakob: “Dit moet waar wees! My seun Josef lewe regtig! Ek sal gaan en hom sien voordat ek sterf.”

Jakob het met al sy besittings die reis na Egipte aangepak. Toe hy Berseba bereik, bring hy offers aan die God van Isak, sy pa.

In die nag het God in ’n visioen met hom gepraat. “Jakob! Jakob!” het Hy geroep.

“Ek luister,” antwoord Jakob.

Toe sê God: “Ek is God, die God van jou pa. Moenie bang wees om Egipte toe te gaan nie, want Ek sal jou daar tot ’n groot nasie maak. Ek gaan saam met jou Egipte toe, maar Ek sal julle weer terugbring. Wanneer jy sterf, sal Josef by jou wees om jou oë toe te druk.”

Jakob het gereedgemaak om vanaf Berseba te vertrek, en sy seuns het hom na Egipte toe gebring. Hulle het hulle pa, hulle kinders en hulle vroue op die waens laat klim wat die farao saamgestuur het.

Jakob het Juda vooruit gestuur na Josef toe om hom te laat weet hy is op pad na Gosen toe. Nadat hulle daar aangekom het, het Josef sy wa laat inspan om sy pa in Gosen te gaan ontmoet. Toe hy by hom kom, het hy sy pa omhels en lank so op sy skouer gestaan en huil.

Toe sê Jakob vir Josef: “Nou kan ek maar sterf, want ek het jou met

my eie oë gesien en weet nou dat jy nog lewe.”

Josef het toe die beste deel van Egipte, die land van Rameses, aan sy pa en broers gegee om hulle daar te vestig, net soos die farao beveel het.

Jakob het nog sewentien jaar na sy aankoms in Egipte geleef. Hy het dus 147 jaar oud geword. Toe sy einde begin naderkom, laat roep hy vir Josef en sê vir hom: “Bewys my ’n laaste guns. Belowe my met ’n eed dat jy goed sal wees vir my en my nie in Egipte sal begrawe nie. Wanneer ek sterf, neem my liggaam uit Egipte weg en begrawe my by my voorouers.”

Josef belowe toe dat hy dit sou doen.

“Nee, lê ’n eed af dat jy dit sal doen,” dring Jakob daarop aan. Josef het hom toe met ’n eed beloof. Daarop het Jakob in aanbidding by die koppenent van die bed gebuig.

Toe sê Jakob vir Josef: “Ek is op die punt om te sterf, maar God sal met julle wees. Hy sal julle terugbring Kanaän toe, na die land van ons voorouers.”

Jakob het op die rype ouderdom van 147 jaar gesterf. Voor daardie laaste dag het hy sy seuns byeengeroep om hulle te seën, hulle toekoms aan te kondig en vir hulle verantwoordelikhede te gee. Nie al die seuns het gekry wat hulle wou hê nie. Ruben is byvoorbeeld aangespreek oor ’n vroeëre seksuele sonde wat hy gehoop het sy pa vergeet het. Jakob se laaste woorde het voorspel dat sommige van sy seuns en hulle nageslag sukses sou smaak en ander moeilike tye sou beleef. Jakob het Josef se twee seuns, Manasse en Efraim, aangeneem soos sy eie; dit het Jakob in staat gestel om vir Josef ’n dubbele erfporsie te gee as die een wie se karakter sy vertrou verdien het.

Ná hulle pa se dood het Josef se broers bang geword. “Nou gaan Josef ons terugbetaal vir al die kwaad wat ons hom aangedoen het,” het hulle gesê. Daarom stuur hulle die volgende boodskap vir Josef: “Voordat jou pa gesterf het, het hy ons beveel om vir jou te sê: ‘Vergewe jou broers tog vir die groot onreg wat hulle jou aangedoen het.’ Vergeef ons tog nou, want ons dien ook die God van jou pa.” Toe Josef hierdie boodskap kry, het hy in trane uitgebars.

Sy broers kom toe self en val voor hom neer. “Ons sal u slawe wees,” het hulle gesê.

Maar Josef sê vir hulle: “Moenie vir my bang wees nie. Ek is nie in God se skoene om julle te straf nie. Julle het my wel kwaad aangedoen, maar God het die kwaad wat julle gedoen het, omgekeer in iets wat goed is. Hy het deur my gesorg dat ’n groot volk oorleef. Moenie bang wees nie. Wees verseker: Ek sal self vir julle en julle gesinne sorg.” Hy het hulle jammer gekry en hulle gerusgestel.

Josef en sy broers het in Egipte bly woon. Josef het 110 jaar oud geword. Hy het nog drie geslagte van sy afstammeling gesien, dié van sy seun Efraim en die kinders van Manasse se seun Makir, wat hy soos sy eie kind behandel het.

“Ek gaan binnekort sterf,” het Josef vir sy broers gesê. “God sal sekerlik vir julle sorg en julle weer uit hierdie land, Egipte, laat wegtrek. Hy sal julle terugneem na die land wat Hy met ’n eed belowe het aan die nageslag van Abraham, Isak en Jakob.” Toe laat Josef die seuns van Israel ’n eed aflê en hy sê: “Wanneer God julle na Kanaän toe teruglei, moet julle my liggaam saam met julle neem.”

Josef het op die ouderdom van 110 jaar gesterf. Hulle het sy liggaam gebalsem en dit in Egipte in ’n doodskis neergelê.

4

Deliverance

NOW JOSEPH and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.

Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and

spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.



Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?”

“Yes, go,” she answered. So the girl went and got the baby’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?”

The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known.”

When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father’s flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, “Why have you returned so early today?”

They answered, “An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.”

“And where is he?” Reuel asked his daughters. “Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.”

Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, “I have become a foreigner in a foreign land.”

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight — why the bush does not burn up.”

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy¹ ground.” Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you.’”

“This is my name forever,
the name you shall call me from
generation to generation.”

Moses said to the LORD, “Pardon your servant, LORD. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it.”

The LORD said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. Then Moses told Aaron everything the LORD had sent him to say, and also about all the signs he had commanded him to perform.

Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

Unfortunately, things didn’t go so well with Moses and Aaron’s first audience with Pharaoh. He not only refused their request to let the people of Israel hold a festival to the Lord in the wilderness, but he also made their slave labor even more difficult. Without reducing their production of bricks, they would have to find their own straw to mix in with the clay.

The Israelite overseers realized they were in trouble when they were told, “You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.” When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and

Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, “May the LORD look on you and judge you! You have made us obnoxious to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and you have not rescued your people at all.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.”

God also said to Moses, “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself fully known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem² you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’”

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a miracle,’ then say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,’ and it will become a snake.”

So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh’s heart

became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Confront him on the bank of the Nile, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. Then say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened. This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.’”

The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt — over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs — and they will turn to blood.’ Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone.”

Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water. Blood was everywhere in Egypt.

But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh’s heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said. Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and did not take even this to heart. And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.

The next plague included millions of frogs, hopping into every kitchen, every street and every field in Egypt. Pharaoh’s court magicians again were able to conjure their own similar plague, and then even more frogs were leaping about. Unable to take one more amphibian, Pharaoh agreed to let the Hebrews go if Moses would get rid of the frogs. Moses prayed and the frogs died. With the immediate crisis resolved, Pharaoh again stubbornly refused to make good on his

part of the deal.

So Moses hit the dust with his staff, and gnats swarmed the land. Pharaoh's magicians could not replicate this plague, and they expressed respect for the Hebrews' God. Still Pharaoh would not budge. God continued to show his power as he prepared to rescue his people.

The cycle continued through plagues that included swarms of flies, a disease that killed livestock, terrible boils that afflicted people and animals, thunderstorms with destructive hail, devouring locusts and a frightening time of darkness. After each devastating plague, Pharaoh assured Moses that he could leave with the people. But later he would change his mind.

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die."

"Just as you say," Moses replied. "I will never appear before you again."

Now the LORD had said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he does, he will drive you out completely."

So Moses said, "This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the female slave, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt — worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal.' Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, 'Go, you and all the people who follow you!' After that I will leave." Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh.

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is

to take a lamb for his family, one for each household.

“The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast.

“This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover.³

“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”

Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

“Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants.”

The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there

was not a house without someone dead.

During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me.”

The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die!”

Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD’s divisions left Egypt.

God had remembered his enslaved people and rescued them. They packed their carts with supplies and spoils freely given to them by the Egyptians and prepared for a long, dusty journey. God provided a sure-fire way for them to stay on course, day and night. But their deliverance from Egypt wasn’t complete yet ...

By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. Pharaoh will think, ‘The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.’ And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.” So the Israelites did this.

When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, “What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!” So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. The Egyptians — all Pharaoh’s horses

and chariots, horsemen and troops — pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the

night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, “Let’s get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen — the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

This unforgettable escape impressed upon the Israelites that God was indeed taking care of them. Enemy horses and chariot drivers were thrown into the sea! The people celebrated and sang for joy.

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?”

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink.

There the LORD issued a ruling and instruction for them and put them to the test. He said, “If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.”

Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

The LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.”

The people called these honey-tasting crackers manna, which sounds like “What is it?” They all received exactly as much as they needed for each day. On the sixth day of the week they gathered a

double portion, for no manna fell on the seventh day, the holy day set apart for rest and worship. And so the people learned to trust God to provide for them and lead them to a new land ... well, not quite.

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses replied, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?”

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?”

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

The LORD answered Moses, “Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

1Holy, holiness: The common literal meaning of this word is *set apart*. God is holy and fundamentally different from humans because of his purity and perfection; however, God invites people to be holy and live in a way that is set apart to serve him.

2Redeem: In this instance, *redeem* refers to rescue from captivity. It can also refer to the payment of the price required to release a guilty person from an obligation.

3Passover: The feast that celebrates the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The *Passover Lamb* refers to the animal sacrificed prior to the feast. This parallels the sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament, which released humanity from the debt of sin.

Bevryding

Josef en sy broers en daardie hele geslag is met verloop van tyd dood. Die Israeliete was egter vrugbaar en het baie kinders gehad. Om die waarheid te sê, hulle was naderhand so baie en invloedryk dat hulle oor die hele land gewoon het.

Daar het toe 'n nuwe koning in Egipte aan bewind gekom. Hy het niks van Josef geweet nie. Hy het vir sy mense gesê: “Hierdie Israeliete is vir ons 'n gevaar. Hulle het meer en sterker as ons geword. Ons moet 'n plan maak om hulle getalle te beperk. As iemand teen ons oorlog maak, sal hulle by ons vyand aansluit. Hulle sal van oral in die land uit die land ontsnap.”

Die Egiptenaars het die Israeliete toe gedwing om vir hulle te werk. Hulle het opsigters oor hulle aangestel. Hulle het die Israeliete harde werk laat doen om hulle te laat swaarkry. Die Israeliete moes die stede Pitom en Rameses vir die farao bou om sy voorrade daarin te stoor. Hoe swaarder die Egiptenaars hulle egter laat werk het, hoe vinniger het hulle meer geword en al verder uitgebrei. Die Egiptenaars het bang geword vir die Israeliete.



Sien "Tydlyn van DIE STORIE"

Hulle het toe die Israeliete met geweld verplig om soos slawe te werk. Hulle het die lewe bitter swaar gemaak vir die Israeliete. Die Israeliete moes stene maak en klippe kap en buite in die veld werk.

Die farao het toe aan al sy mense opdrag gegee: “Elke Israelitiese seuntjie wat gebore word, moet julle in die Nylrivier verdrink. Julle kan die dogtertjies maar laat lewe.”

In hierdie tyd het 'n man uit die stam van Levi met 'n vrou uit dieselfde stam getrou. Die vrou het verwag en 'n seun in die wêreld gebring. Toe sy sien hoe mooi hy is, het sy hom vir drie maande lank weggesteek. Toe sy hom nie langer kon wegsteek nie, het sy 'n

mandjie van riet gevat en dit met klei en pik waterdig gemaak. Sy het die baba in die mandjie gesit en hom tussen die riete van die Nylrivier weggesteek. Die baba se sussie het hom van 'n afstand af dopgehou.

Een van die farao se dogters het afgekom na die Nylrivier om daar te kom bad. Haar bediendes het op die oewer waggestaan. Toe die prinses die mandjie tussen die riete sien, het sy een van haar meisies gestuur om dit te gaan uithaal. Toe sy die mandjie oopmaak, kry sy die seuntjie wat daarin lê en huil. Sy het hom jammer gekry. "Dit moet een van die Hebreeuse kinders wees," het sy gesê.

Die seuntjie se suster het toe nadergekom en die prinses gevra: "Sal ek 'n Hebreeuse vrou gaan haal om die baba vir u te versorg?"

"Ja, asseblief," het die farao se dogter geantwoord. Die meisie het die seuntjie se ma gaan roep. "Vat hierdie babatjie en gaan voed hom," het die farao se dogter vir haar gesê. "Ek sal jou daarvoor betaal." Sy eie ma het hom gevat en gaan versorg. Toe hy groot genoeg was, het sy hom na die farao se dogter gevat en sy het hom as haar eie seun aangeneem. Sy het hom "Moses" genoem, "want," het sy gesê, "ek het hom uit die water gehaal."

Op 'n goeie dag toe Moses al 'n groot man was, het hy by sy mense gaan kuier. Hy het gesien hoe hard hulle moes werk. Terwyl hy daar was, sien hy hoe 'n Egiptenaar een van sy volksgenote uit die Hebreeuse slawe aanrand. Moses het goed rondgekyk en toe hy seker was dat daar niemand naby is nie, het hy die Egiptenaar doodgeslaan. Hy het hom in die sand begrawe. Toe hy die volgende dag weer by hulle kom, sien hy twee Hebreërs wat met mekaar baklei. Hy sê toe vir die een wat verkeerd was: "Waarom rand jy jou volksgenoot aan?"

"Wie is jy nogal?" het die man teruggeantwoord. "Wie het jou as baas en regter oor ons aangestel? Wil jy my ook doodmaak soos jy die Egiptenaar gister doodgemaak het?" Moses het geskrik. Hy het vir homself gesê: "Almal weet wat gebeur het."

Die farao het ook van die ding te hore gekom. Hy het opdrag gegee dat Moses gesoek en tereggestel moes word. Moses het egter vir die farao gevlug. Moses het in die landstreek van Midian gaan woon. Terwyl hy daar by 'n put sit, het die priester van Midian se sewe dogters daar kom water skep. Hulle het die drinkbakke vol water gemaak sodat hulle pa se diere kon suip. Daar kom toe mans wat vee oppas en verdryf die meisies van die put af. Moses het die meisies te hulp gesnel en hulle gehelp om hulle vee te laat suip.

Toe hulle by hulle pa, Reüel, terugkom, vra hy vir sy dogters: "Hoe is julle dan vandag so vroeg terug?"

“Daar was ’n man uit Egipte wat ons teen die mans verdedig het,” sê hulle vir hom. “Hy het ons help water skep en die vee laat drink.”

“Nou waar is hy dan?” vra hy vir sy dogters. “Het julle die man dan net daar gelos? Gaan nooit hom uit om saam te kom eet.”

Moses het die uitnodiging met graagte aanvaar. Hy het by die man gebly. Na ’n tyd het Reüel sy dogter Sippora vir hom as vrou gegee. Sy het later ’n seuntjie gehad. Moses het hom Gersom genoem. Hy het gesê: “Ek is ’n vreemdeling in ’n vreemde land.”

Baie jare het verbygegaan. Daardie koning van Egipte is later dood. Die Israeliete het egter nog steeds gebuk gegaan onder slawewerk. Hulle het om hulp geroep. Hulle gesoebat om bevry te word van die harde werk het na God toe opgestyg. God het gehoor hoe hulle roep. Hy het onthou dat Hy ’n verbond met Abraham, Isak en Jakob gesluit het en gesien wat met die Israeliete gebeur. Hy was bekommerd oor hulle.

Moses het sy skoonpa, Jetro, se skape opgepas. Jetro was een van die priesters van Midian. Moses het al dieper in die woestyn inbeweeg en by Horeb uitgekom. Dit is die berg van God. Skielik het die engel van God aan hom verskyn in ’n vlam wat in ’n bos brand. Moses was verwonderd, want die bos het aanhou brand, maar dit het nie uitgebrand nie. “Dit is snaaks,” het Moses vir homself gesê. “Hoekom brand die bos dan nie uit nie? Laat ek gaan kyk wat aangaan.”

Toe die HERE sien dat Moses naderkom om ondersoek in te stel, het Hy uit die bos na hom geroep: “Moses, Moses!”

“Dit is ek, ja,” het Moses geantwoord.

“Moenie nog naderkom nie,” het die HERE vir hom gesê. “Trek uit jou sandale. Die plek waarop jy staan, is heilige grond.” God sê toe vir hom: “Ek is die God van jou voorouers – die God van Abraham, die God van Isak en die God van Jakob.” Toe Moses dit hoor, het hy sy hande voor sy gesig gehou. Hy was bang om na God te kyk.

Die HERE sê toe vir hom: “Jy kan seker wees dat Ek gesien het hoe swaar my volk in Egipte kry. Ek het gehoor hoe hulle teen hulle slawedrywers om hulp roep. Ek is baie bewus van hoe swaar hulle kry. Daarom het Ek afgekom om hulle van die Egiptenaars te bevry en hulle weg te lei uit Egipte na hulle eie mooi, groot land. Dit is ’n land met oorgenoeg kos. Die Kanaäniete, Hetiete, Amoriete, Feresiete, Hewiete en Jebusiete bly nou daar. Die volk se noodroep het by My uitgekom en Ek het raakgesien hoe die Egiptenaars hulle verdruk en swaar laat werk. Gaan nou! Ek stuur jou na die farao toe. Jy moet my volk, die Israeliete, weglei uit Egipte uit.”

“Maar wie is ek dan om voor die farao te verskyn?” het Moses vir God gevra. “Hoe kan U dit van my verwag om die Israeliete uit Egipte weg te lei?”

God het geantwoord: “Ek sal by jou wees. Wanneer jy die volk uitgelei het uit Egipte en julle God by hierdie selfde berg kom aanbid, sal dit vir jou die bewys wees dat dit Ek is wat jou gestuur het.”

Moses het egter teëgestribbel: “As ek by die volk van Israel kom en vir hulle sê: ‘Die God van julle voorouers het my na julle toe gestuur,’ sal hulle my nie glo nie. Hulle sal vra: ‘En wie is Hy eintlik?’ Wat moet ek dan vir hulle sê?”

God het hom geantwoord: “Ek is soos wat Ek is. Sê maar net vir hulle: ‘Ek Is’ het my na julle toe gestuur.”

God het verder vir Moses gesê: “Sê vir die Israeliete: ‘Die HERE, die God van julle voorouers – die God van Abraham, die God van Isak en die God van Jakob – het my na julle toe gestuur.’”

“Dit sal altyd my Naam wees
en dit is wat elke geslag My sal noem.”

Moses het by die HERE gepleit: “Ag, Here, ek is nie goed met my mond nie. Ek was nog nooit iemand wat goed kon praat nie. Selfs waar U nou hier met my praat, haak my tong vas.”

“Wie gee vir die mens ’n mond?” vra die HERE hom. “Wie maak mense stom of doof? Wie laat hulle sien of maak hulle blind? Is dit nie maar net Ek, die HERE, nie? Loop, gaan maak soos Ek vir jou sê! Ek sal jou goed laat praat en vir jou voorsê wat jy moet sê.”

Maar Moses het bly pleit: “Here, stuur asseblief tog iemand anders.”

Toe het die HERE Hom vir Moses vererg. “Goed,” het Hy gesê. “Wat van jou broer, Aäron, uit die Leviete? Hy kan tog goed praat. Hy is alreeds op pad om jou te kom ontmoet. Hy gaan baie bly wees om jou weer te sien. Jy sal vir hom voorsê wat om te sê. Ek sal julle help om te praat en vir julle sê wat moet gebeur. Aäron sal namens jou met die volk praat. Hy sal jou mond wees. Jy sal soos God wees wat vir hom voorsê wat hy moet sê. Maak seker dat jy jou herderstok by jou het sodat jy daarmee die tekens kan doen wat Ek jou geleer het.”

Die HERE het vir Aäron gesê: “Gaan ontmoet Moses in die woestyn.” Aäron het gegaan en Moses by die berg van God teëgekom. Hy het hom omhels. Moses het vir Aäron alles vertel van die opdrag wat die HERE hom gegee het en die tekens wat hy moes doen.

Moses en Aäron is toe terug na Egipte waar hulle al die leiers van

die Israeliete bymekaareroep het. Aäron het vir hulle van alles vertel wat die HERE vir Moses gesê het. Terwyl hulle toekyk, het Moses die tekens gedoen. Die leiers was dadelik oortuig dat die HERE Moses en Aäron gestuur het. Hulle het almal hulle koppe gebuig en op hulle knieë gegaan toe hulle hoor dat die HERE bekommerd is oor Israel en hulle ellende raakgesien het.

Ongelukkig het alles nie so goed afgeloop met Moses en Aäron se eerste oudiënsie met Farao nie. Hy het nie net geweier dat die Israeliete hulle fees vir die Here in die woestyn kan gaan hou nie, hy het ook hulle slawe-arbeid moeiliker gemaak. Hulle mag nie minder bakstene maak nie, maar moes nou hulle eie strooi kry om met die klei te meng.

Omdat hulle steeds elke dag dieselfde hoeveelheid stene soos vantevore moes maak, het die Israelitiese opsigters gesien dat daar groot moeilikheid kom. Toe hulle van die farao af weer buite kom, het Moses en Aäron daar vir hulle gestaan en wag. Die opsigters sê vir hulle: “Die HERE sien wat julle aangevang het. Hy sal julle straf vir die gemors waarin julle ons by die farao en sy mense laat beland het. Julle het hulle rede gegee om ons dood te maak.”

Moses het na die HERE toe teruggegaan en by Hom gekla: “Here, hoekom maak U so lelik met u eie mense? Waarom het U my dan gestuur? Vandat ek by die farao gekom het om vir hom te sê wat U van hom eis, het hy hierdie volk net al slegter behandel. U het nog nie ’n ding gedoen om u volk te red nie!”

Toe sê die HERE vir Moses: “Nou gaan jy sien wat Ek met die farao gaan doen. Ek gaan hom dwing om my volk te laat gaan. Hy sal selfs by hulle aandrang om pad te gee uit sy land.”

Die HERE het verder vir Moses gesê: “Ek is die HERE. Ek het My aan Abraham, Isak en Jakob voorgestel as ‘God die Almagtige’. Hulle het My nie geken as ‘die HERE’ nie. Ek het met hulle ’n ooreenkoms gemaak om die land Kanaän, waarin hulle vir ’n tydjie oorgebly het, vir hulle te gee. Jy kan verseker weet dat Ek gehoor het hoe die mense van Israel kla omdat hulle soos slawe vir die Egiptenaars werk. Ek het onthou van my ooreenkoms met hulle.

“Daarom moet jy vir die Israeliete gaan sê: ‘Ek is die HERE. Ek sal julle verlos van die slawewerk in Egipte. Ek sal julle bevry met krag en met sterk vergeldingsdade. Ek maak julle my eie volk. Ek sal julle God wees. Julle sal weet dat dit Ek, die HERE julle God, is wat julle van die slawewerk in Egipte bevry het. Ek sal julle laat kom in die land wat Ek

onder eed vir Abraham, Isak en Jakob belowe het. Dit sal julle eie land wees. Ek is die HERE.”

Die HERE het toe vir Moses en Aäron gesê: “Die farao sal van julle verwag dat julle vir hom ’n wonderteken moet doen. Jy moet dan vir Aäron sê: ‘Gooi jou herderstok voor die farao op die grond!’ Dit sal dan in ’n slang verander.”

Moses en Aäron het met die farao gaan praat. Hulle het net so gemaak soos die HERE vir hulle gesê het. Aäron het sy herderstok voor die farao en sy hofamptenare neergegooi en dit het in ’n slang verander. Die farao het toe sy wyse manne en towenaars nadergeroep. Hulle het met hulle kunsies presies dieselfde ding gedoen. Toe die manne hulle stokke neergooi, het dit ook in slange verander. Maar Aäron se slang het hulle slange ingesluk. Die farao het egter hardkoppig gebly. Hy wou nog steeds nie na hulle luister nie. Dit was presies net soos die HERE gesê het dit sou gebeur.

Die HERE sê toe vir Moses: “Die farao bly nog steeds eiesinnig en hy weier steeds dat die volk kan gaan. Môre-oggend, wanneer die farao afgaan na die rivier toe, moet jy met hom gaan praat. Gaan staan langs die rivier en wag vir hom daar. Vat die herderstok wat in ’n slang verander het saam met jou. Sê dan vir hom: ‘Die HERE, die God van die Hebreërs, het my na jou toe gestuur om vir jou te sê: Laat my volk gaan om My in die woestyn te aanbid. Tot nou toe het jy geweier om na My te luister. Daarom stuur die HERE nou vir jou ’n boodskap waaraan jy kan weet wie Ek die HERE is. Ek gaan met hierdie stok in my hand op die rivier se water slaan en dit gaan alles in bloed verander. Die vis in die rivier gaan vrek en dit sal begin sleg ruik. Die Egiptenaars sal nie die water van die Nylrivier kan drink nie.”

Die HERE het ook nog vir Moses gesê: “Sê vir Aäron hy moet sy stok uitsteek in die rigting van al die plekke waar daar in Egipte water is – al sy riviere, sy kanale, sy moerasse en sy opgaarplekke. Oral in Egipte sal die water in bloed verander, selfs die water in houters en kruike in mense se huise.”

Moses en Aäron het toe presies net so gemaak soos die HERE vir hulle gesê het. Terwyl die farao en al sy amptenare staan en kyk, het Moses sy stok gevat en op die water van die rivier geslaan. Al die water in die rivier het toe in bloed verander. Die vis in die rivier het gevrek. Die water het so sleg begin ruik dat die Egiptenaars dit nie kon drink nie. Deur die hele Egipte was daar net bloed.

Maar die towenaars van Egipte het hulle kunsies gebruik en kon ook water in bloed verander. Dit het gemaak dat die farao steeds nie

na hulle geluister het nie. Dit was soos die HERE gesê het dit sou gebeur. Die farao het omgedraai en na sy paleis toe teruggegaan. Hy het hom nie verder aan die saak gesteur nie. Die Egiptenaars het toe putte al langs die rivier begin grawe vir drinkwater. Hulle kon nie die water van die rivier drink nie.

Die volgende plaag het miljoene paddas ingesluit wat in elke kombuis, straat en veld in Egipte gehop het. Farao se towenaars kon weer 'n soortgelyke plaag optower en toe het daar selfs meer paddas rondgehop. Farao het genoeg gehad van die amfibieë en stem toe in dat die Hebreërs kan gaan as Moses net ontslae sal raak van die paddas. Moses het gebid en al die paddas het gevrek. Met die onmiddellike krisis opgelos, het Farao weer hardkoppig geweier om sy deel van die ooreenkoms na te kom.

Moses slaan toe met sy staf in die stof, en swerms muggies het oor die land begin vlieg. Farao se towenaars kon nie hierdie plaag nadoen nie, en hulle het hulle respek vir die Hebreërs se God betoon. Maar steeds wou Farao nie toegee nie. God het voortgegaan om sy krag te bewys terwyl Hy voorberei het om sy mense te red.

Die siklus het voortgegaan met plaë wat swerms vlieë, 'n siekte onder die diere, swere wat mens en dier getref het, donderstorms met verwoestende haelkorrels, sprinkane en stikdonkerte ingesluit het. Na elke verwoestende plaag het Farao vir Moses verseker dat hy saam met sy mense kan gaan. Maar later sou hy weer van plan verander.

Die HERE het die farao maar weer hardkoppig gemaak. Hy het steeds nie ingestem om hulle te laat gaan nie. “Loop hier weg!” het die farao vir Moses geskreeu. “Sorg dat ek jou nooit weer sien nie. As ek jou ooit weer sien, maak ek jou dood!”

“Nou goed dan!” het Moses geantwoord. “Dit is net soos u sê. Ek sal u nooit weer sien nie.”

Toe sê die HERE vir Moses: “Ek gaan nog een verdere ramp oor die farao en Egipte laat kom. Daarna sal hy julle laat gaan. Om die waarheid te sê, hy sal so graag van julle ontslae wil raak dat hy julle van hier af gaan wegjaag.”

Moses het toe vir die farao gesê: “Die HERE het besluit: Teen middernag gaan Ek deur Egipte beweeg. Dan sal die oudste seun in elke gesin in Egipte sterf, vanaf die oudste seun van die farao tot die oudste seun van die onbelangrikste diensmeisie. Selfs onder die diere sal die een wat eerste gebore is, getref word. 'n Droewige gehuil sal in

Egipte opklink soos daar nog nooit was nie en nooit weer gehoor sal word nie. By die Israeliete sal dit egter doodstil wees. Daar sal 'n hond nie eers vir 'n mens of 'n dier grom nie. Dit sal duidelik wees dat die HERE onderskeid maak tussen Israel en die Egiptenaars. Al die amptenare van Egipte sal dan voor my kom neerval en my smeek: "Trek tog en vat al jou volgelinge saam met jou!" Eers dan sal ek gaan!" Moses is toe kwaad van die farao af weg.

Terwyl hulle nog in Egipte was, het die HERE vir Moses en Aäron gesê: "Hierdie maand sal van nou af die belangrikste maand wees. Die nuwe jaar moet met hierdie maand begin. Julle moet vir al die Israeliete die opdrag gee dat elke gesin op die tiende van hierdie maand vir hulle 'n lam in die hande moet kry.

"Dit moet 'n rammetjie wees uit die skape of die bokke wat 'n jaar oud is en waarmee daar niks verkeerd is nie. Sorg vir die rammetjie tot op die veertiende van die maand. Elke gesin in Israel moet teen skemertyd sy rammetjie slag. Hulle moet van die rammetjie se bloed vat en daarvan smeer aan die bokant en sykante van die kosyn van die huis se voordeur waarin hulle dit gaan eet. Die vleis word oor die vuur gebraai. Dit moet nog daardie selfde aand saam met brood wat sonder suurdeeg gemaak is en met kruie geëet word.

"Wanneer julle dit eet, moet julle aangetrek wees om op reis te gaan. Julle moet skoene aanhê en julle kieres moet al in julle hande wees. Eet die kos vinnig. Dit is die HERE se Paasfees.

"Ek sal daardie nag deur Egipte trek en in die land al die oudste seuns en die diere wat eerste gebore is, doodmaak. Ek sal die gode van Egipte straf. Ek is die HERE! Die bloed wat julle aan julle kosyne gesmeer het, sal vir My 'n teken wees dat julle daar bly. As Ek dit sien, sal Ek daardie huis oorslaan. Die ramp wat Ek oor Egipte laat kom, sal julle nie tref nie."

Moses het toe die leiers van Israel bymekaargeroep en vir hulle gesê: "Laat elke gesin vir hulle 'n rammetjie vang sodat hulle dit vir die Paasfees kan slag. Vang die dier se bloed op in 'n houer. Vat dan 'n takkie van 'n hisopboom en doop dit in die bloed. Verf dan die bloed bo-aan die kosyn met die hisoptak en aan die kant van die huis se deur. Niemand mag by die deur uitgaan voor die volgende oggend nie. Die HERE gaan deur die land trek om die Egiptenaars dood te maak. Wanneer Hy die bloed aan die bokant en die sykante van die deur

sien, sal die HERE by daardie deur verbygaan. By daardie huis sal Hy nie toelaat dat die verwoester ingaan om hulle te tref nie.

“Onthou dat hierdie ’n vasstaande voorskrif is wat ook vir julle nageslagte geld.”

Die Israëliete het presies net so gaan maak soos die HERE vir hulle deur Moses en Aäron gesê het.

Teen middernag het die HERE al die Egiptiese seuns wat eerste gebore is, laat sterf, vanaf die farao wat oor die land regeer se oudste seun tot by die oudste seun van die gevangene wat in die tronk sit. Selfs die vee wat eerste gebore is, het gevrek. Die farao, sy amptenare en al die mense van Egipte het in die nag wakker geword en opgestaan. Deur die hele Egipte kon gehoor word hoe mense droewig huil. Daar was nie ’n enkele huis waarin daar nie iemand dood is nie. Gedurende dieselfde nag nog het die farao Moses en Aäron laat roep. “Maak dat julle wegkom!” het hy geskreeu. “Julle en al die Israëliete moet padgee van my volk af. Gaan en dien die HERE soos julle gevra het. Vat julle skape en beeste saam met julle soos julle gevra het en maak dat julle wegkom! Onthou net om my te seën wanneer julle gaan!”

Die Egiptenaars het by die volk gesoebat om so gou moontlik uit die land pad te gee, want hulle het gedink: “Ons sal nog almal doodgaan!”

Die Israëliete het 430 jaar lank in Egipte gebly. Presies aan die einde van die 430 jaar is die HERE se mense uit Egipte weg.

God het sy mense wat as slawe behandel is, onthou en hulle bevry. Hulle het al hulle besittings opgepak met voorrade en rykdomme wat die Egiptenare vrylik vir hulle gegee het. Hulle het gereedgemaak vir ’n lang, stowwerige reis. God het natuurlik vir hulle ’n manier gegee om op koers te bly, dag en nag. Maar hulle bevryding uit Egipte was nog nie afgehandel nie ...

Gedurende die dag het die HERE vir hulle die pad gewys met ’n hoë wolkstapel wat voor hulle uitgegaan het. Gedurende die nag het ’n wolk waarin vuur was vir hulle lig gegee. So kon hulle bly trek of dit nou dag of nag was. Die wolkstapel in die dag en die wolk met vuur in gedurende die nag het nooit voor die volk weggegaan nie.

Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Sê vir die Israëliete hulle moet wegdraai en gaan kamp opslaan by Pi-Hagirot. Hulle kamp moet langs die see staan reg teenoor Baäl-Sefon, tussen Migdol en die see. Die

farao sal dan dink dat die Israeliete verdwaal het en die woestyn hulle gevang het. Ek sal die farao weer hardkoppig maak. Hy gaan julle agternasit. Die farao en sy leër gaan egter teen My verloor. Die Egiptenaars sal moet erken dat Ek die HERE is.” Die Israeliete het toe daar kamp opgeslaan.

Toe die koning van Egipte berig kry dat die volk weggekom het, het hy en sy amptenare se houding teenoor die volk verander. “Wat het ons aangevang om die Israeliete wat vir ons gewerk het van ons af te laat weggaan?” het hulle hulle afgevra. Die farao het toe sy oorlogswa laat inspan en sy leër saam met hom gevat. Hy het ook al Egipte se oorlogswaens saamgeneem. Op elkeen was daar ’n bemanning van drie. Onder hulle was sy 600 beste oorlogswaens. Die HERE het die farao, Egipte se koning, vasberade gemaak. Hy het die Israeliete wat so maklik weggekom het, agternagesit. Egipte het hulle agternagejaag met al hulle perde, Farao se oorlogswaens, sy ruiters en sy leër. Hulle het die Israeliete ingehaal waar hulle kamp opgeslaan het langs die see naby Pi-Hagirot oorkant Baäl-Sefon.

Die farao het hulle begin inhaal. Toe die Israeliete sien dat die Egiptenaars agter hulle aan is, het hulle baie bang geword. Hulle het by die HERE begin pleit om hulle te help. Hulle het ook by Moses gaan kla: “Was daar nie genoeg plek in Egipte om ons daar te begrawe nie dat jy ons hiernatoe moes bring om hier in die woestyn te sterf? Wat het jy met ons aangevang om ons uit Egipte te laat trek? Het ons nie vir jou gesê om ons met rus te laat toe ons nog in Egipte slawe was nie? Dit was beter om slawe vir die Egiptenaars te wees as om lyke in die woestyn te wees!”

Moses het die volk geantwoord: “Moenie bang wees nie. Staan net daar waar julle is en kyk hoe die HERE julle vandag red. Hierdie Egiptenaars wat julle vandag hier voor julle sien, sal nooit ooit weer gesien word nie. Wag en kyk! Die HERE sal in julle plek veg.”

Die HERE het toe vir Moses gesê: “Vir wat staan jy so benoud en roep na My? Sê die mense moet begin beweeg. Vat jou herderstok in jou hand en hou dit uit oor die water. Daar sal ’n pad deur die water kom waarlangs die Israeliete op droë grond kan trek. Ek sal die Egiptenaars vasberade maak om agter die Israeliete aan te gaan. Ek sal beroemd word deur wat Ek met die farao, sy hele leër, sy waens en sy ruiters gaan maak. Wanneer Ek klaar is met die farao, sy oorlogswaens en sy ruiters, sal Egipte weet dat Ek die HERE is.”

God se boodskapper wat die optog van Israel gelei het, het toe agter hulle gaan staan. Die wolkkolom wat voor hulle uitbeweeg het, het

ook agter hulle ingeskuif sodat dit gehang het tussen die plek waar die Israeliete kamp opgeslaan het en waar die Egiptiese kamp was. Dit was donker aan Egipte se kant, maar gedurende die nag was dit lig aan Israel se kant. Die twee groepe kon nie deur die nag nader aan mekaar kom nie.

Moses het toe sy hand oor die see uitgesteek. Die HERE het die water teruggedryf met 'n sterk oostewind wat deur die nag gewaai het. Die water het oopgekloof en die seebodem het droog geword. Die Israeliete het op droë grond deur die see getrek met die water soos mure aan weerskante van hulle.

Die Egiptenaars is toe agter hulle aan met al die farao se perde en sy oorlogwaens en hulle bemanning, reguit die see in. Vroegoggend het die HERE van bo uit die wolk van vuur en uit die stapelwolk op die leër van die Egiptenaars afgekyk. Hy het verwarring onder hulle laat ontstaan. Hy het die wiele van hulle oorlogwaens laat vasval sodat hulle nie kon beweeg nie. “Laat ons padgee van Israel!” het die Egiptenaars geskreeu. “Die HERE veg in Israel se plek teen ons.”

Die HERE het toe vir Moses gesê: “Steek weer jou hand uit oor die see. Die water sal terugstroom oor die Egiptenaars, oor hulle oorlogwaens en hulle bemanning.” Terwyl die son besig was om op te kom het Moses sy hand oor die see uitgestrek. Die water het teruggestroom na sy ou plek toe. Die Egiptenaars het voor die water probeer vlug, maar die HERE het hulle in die golwe laat verdrink. Die water het oor die oorlogwaens gestroom en ook bo-oor die leër van die farao. Nie een van die Egiptenaars wat die Israeliete agternagesit het, het daardie dag weggekom nie.

Israel het egter op droë grond deur die middel van die see getrek, terwyl die water soos mure alkante van hulle gestaan het.

Hierdie onvergeetlike ontsnapping het vir die Israeliete onomwonde gewys dat God inderdaad vir hulle sorg. Vyandelike strydwaens en bemanning is in die see gegooi. Die mense het feesgevier en gesing van vreugde.

Moses het die volk toe weggelei van die Rietsee af. Hulle het na die Surwoestyn getrek. Drie dae lank het hulle deur die woestyn getrek en geen water gekry nie. Toe hulle by die plek Mara kom, was daar uiteindelik water. Die water was egter brak en hulle kon dit nie drink nie. Dit is hoekom die plek Mara genoem is. Die volk het toe by Moses gaan kla: “Wat moet ons dan drink?”

Moses het hulp by die HERE gaan soek. Die HERE het vir hom 'n stuk

hout uitgewys. Hy het dit gevat en in die water gegooi. Dit het die water drinkbaar gemaak.

Dit was hier by Mara waar die HERE die volgende reëling getref het om hulle te toets: “As julle goed luister na die HERE julle God en doen wat vir Hom reg is, gehoorsaam is aan sy wette en reëls, dan sal Ek julle nie dieselfde dinge laat oorkom as die Egiptenaars nie. Ek is die HERE wat julle gesond sal hou.”

Toe hulle van Mara af weg is, het hulle by Elim gekom. Daar was ’n oase met twaalf fonteine en 70 palmbome. Hulle het daar kamp opgeslaan.

Die Israëliete is weg van Elim af en het by die Sinwoestyn tussen Elim en die Sinaïberg aangekom. Dit was ’n maand nadat hulle uit Egipte weg is. Daar in die woestyn het almal teen Moses en Aäron begin uitvaar: “Die HERE kon ons eerder in Egipte laat doodgaan het. Daar was ten minste genoeg om te eet. Nou het julle ons hier na die woestyn toe gebring sodat almal hier van honger kan doodgaan.”

Moses en Aäron het vir die Israëliete gesê: “Teen vanaand sal julle weet dat dit die HERE self is wat julle uit Egipte laat wegtrek het. Môre-oggend sal julle sien hoe groot die HERE is. Hy het gehoor hoe julle oor Hom kla. Dis eintlik teen Hóm wat julle so uitvaar en nie teen ons nie.” Moses het ook gesê: “Omdat die HERE gehoor het hoe julle oor Hom kla, sal Hy teen die aand vir julle vleis gee om te eet en soggens brood om van versadig te word. Dit was eintlik teen die HERE wat julle gepraat het, nie teen ons nie.”

Moses sê toe vir Aäron: “Gaan sê vir die Israëliete: ‘Kom voor die HERE bymekaar, want Hy het gehoor wat julle teen Hom sê.’”

Terwyl Aäron besig was om met hulle te praat, het hulle na die woestyn toe gedraai. Hulle kon in die wolkkolom wat voor hulle uitgegaan het, sien hoe groot God is.

Die HERE het toe vir Moses gesê: “Ek het die gekla van die volk gehoor. Sê vir hulle: ‘Julle sal teen skemer vleis hê om te eet en môre-oggend brood om van versadig te word. Julle sal dan weet dat Ek die HERE julle God is.’”

Teen die aand het daar kwartels aangevlieg gekom en oral in die laer gaan sit. Die volgende oggend het daar dou reg rondom die kamp gelê. Toe die dou later die dag verdwyn, was die grond van die woestyn bedek met fyn vlokkies wat soos ryp lyk. Die Israëliete was verwonderd toe hulle dit sien. Hulle het vir mekaar gevra: “Wat is dit hierdie?” want hulle het dit nie geken nie.

Moses antwoord hulle: “Dit is die kos wat die HERE vir julle gee om

van te eet.”

Die mense het hierdie kos wat soos heuning proe manna genoem, wat klink soos “Wat is dit?”. Hulle het elkeen elke dag presies die regte hoeveelheid gekry wat hulle nodig gehad het. Op die sesde dag het hulle ’n dubbele porsie gekry omdat daar nie op die sewende dag manna geval het nie. Die heilige dag was opsy gesit vir rus en aanbidding. En so het die mense geleer om op God te vertrou om vir hulle te voorsien en hulle na die nuwe land te lei ... wel, nie heeltemal nie.

Die Israeliete is van die Sinwoestyn af weg en die HERE het hulle gelei totdat hulle by Refidim uitgekom het. Daar was egter nie genoeg water vir die volk om te drink nie. Die volk het met Moses gestry. Hulle het van hom geëis: “Ons wil water hê om te drink!”

Maar Moses het vir hulle gesê: “Waarom stry julle met my? Waarom tart julle die HERE?”

Hulle was egter baie dors en het weer na Moses toe gegaan en teen hom uitgevaar: “Waarom het jy ons en ons kinders en ons vee uit Egipte laat trek om hier van dors dood te gaan?”

Moses het toe by die HERE gaan soebat: “Wat moet ek met hierdie volk maak? Hulle gaan my sonder die minste aanmoediging met klippe doodgooi.”

Die HERE het toe vir Moses gesê: “Vat die stok waarmee jy op die Nylrivier geslaan het, gaan na die volk toe en vat ’n klomp van die oudste manne saam met jou. Slaan met jou stok op die rots by Horeb. Ek staan daar en wag vir jou. Daar sal water uit die rots kom dat die volk kan drink.” Moses het toe presies net so gemaak terwyl die oudste manne staan en kyk. Moses het daardie plek toe “Massa en Meriba” genoem, want die Israeliete het daar met Moses rusie gemaak. Hulle het die HERE uitgetart toe hulle gevra het: “Gaan die HERE ons ooit help?”

5

New Commands and a New

Covenant

ON THE FIRST DAY of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt — on that very day — they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

The LORD said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.” Then Moses told the LORD what the people had said.



And the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate¹ them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. They are to be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on them. No person or animal shall be permitted to live.’ Only when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast may they approach the mountain.”

After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, “Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.”

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the LORD said to him, “Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them.”

Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, ‘Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.’”

The LORD replied, “Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them.”

So Moses went down to the people and told them.

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”

Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

On the cloud-covered summit of Mount Sinai, God handed down the ten most-quoted, best-known rules humankind has ever heard—straightforward, no-nonsense rules for how the Israelites were to

relate to God (commands 1–4) and to each other (commands 5–10).

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

“You shall have no other gods before me.

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Moses was clearly the intermediary between God and the Hebrew people. After Moses received the Ten Commandments, he was given the laws of the Book of the Covenant— consisting largely of expansions of the Ten Commandments. Now he would lead the Israelites in establishing their covenant with the Lord.

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.² Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction."

When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give.

"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle³ and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."

Along with giving Moses the Ten Commandments and other laws, God instructed him as to how to organize worship for the Israelites. From that time on, God's presence would reside in the tabernacle, a portable tent of worship. Inside the tabernacle sat the lavishly designed ark of the covenant,⁴ containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.

God set apart priests for service, who conducted ritual sacrifices and other important worship activities. One day every week—the Sabbath—was set apart to worship God and to rest from chores and business.

Moses was away on the mountain for nearly six weeks. Meanwhile in the valley below, the people's impatience would lead to Moses facing a bitter homecoming.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol⁵ cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a

stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. “Lord,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “There is the sound of war in the camp.”

Moses replied:

“It is not the sound of victory,
it is not the sound of defeat;
it is the sound of singing that I hear.”

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

He said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?”

“Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone

these people are to evil. They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’ So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him.

Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’” The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”

The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

So Moses went back to the LORD and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin — but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

The LORD replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you,

because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.”

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

And the LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.”

And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”

Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

The LORD said to Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain.”

So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. “Lord,” he said, “if I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.”

Then the LORD said: “I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you.

“Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.” Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the

tablets the words of the covenant — the Ten Commandments.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.

When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

Moses had experienced God's awesome presence, and it showed. Now God would come down and reside among his people — in the tabernacle. This holy tent provided space for the rituals of sacrifice and cleansing from sin that God required. The best Hebrew artisans used their skills in woodworking, metalworking, weaving and embroidering to craft the materials for the tabernacle, including the lampstand, the table for sacred bread and the ark of the covenant. The ark was gold-covered, with poles of acacia wood, also covered with gold, for transport. The specifications for all these materials were quite detailed, and the results must have been beautiful indeed. Yet the most awesome and important feature of this portable temple was not the furniture that filled it, but the Person who filled it.

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out — until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.

During the year that the Israelites were camped near Mount Sinai, God taught them who he was and what he required of them: “I am holy, so you are to be holy.” God instructed his people to bring specific offerings to the tabernacle — burnt offerings, grain offerings, fellowship offerings, sin offerings and guilt offerings. The line of priests was anointed⁶ and an intricate system of animal sacrifices was instituted for the atonement of the people’s sins.

The Hebrews learned God’s laws about marriage and divorce, appropriate sexual relations, punishment for murder and robbery and how to make restitution for wrongs. God desired that his people become compassionate, merciful and just.

The promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was now a reality. And this new nation was to be different, so that the entire world would know and worship the one true God, the very source of life and hope.

1‘Consecrate: To dedicate a person or thing to God’s service.

2Twelve tribes of Israel: The twelve groups that inhabited Israel after leaving Egypt. Each group was descended from one of Jacob’s twelve sons.

3Tabernacle: A portable structure, also referred to as the *tent of meeting*, in which the presence of God dwelled with his people. A permanent temple replacing the tabernacle was later built by King Solomon.

4Ark of the covenant: A portable wooden chest covered with gold, about four feet by two-and-a-half feet wide, which contained the Ten Commandments. The Israelites considered it the most important symbol of God’s continual presence with them.

5Idol: Any object, person or idea that someone worships other than the one true God.

6Anoint, anointed: To pour oil on a person (usually on their head) as a ceremonial symbol, setting him or her apart for blessings or special service to God. An object can also be anointed to show its sacredness or significance in worship. The term *anointed* can sometimes be interchanged with *choose*, as in the phrase, “God’s anointed.”

Nuwe wette en 'n nuwe verbond

Die Israeliete het in die woestyn van Sinai aangekom presies twee maande nadat hulle uit Egipte weg is. Nadat hulle by Refidim opgepak het, het hulle in die woestyn van Sinai aangekom. Israel het daar in die woestyn kamp opgeslaan, reg teenoor die berg.

Moses het teen die berg uitgeklim na God toe. Die HERE het bo van die berg af met hom gepraat en vir hom gesê: “Sê vir die mense van Jakob en vir die volk van Israel die volgende: ‘Julle het gesien wat Ek met die Egiptenaars gemaak het en hoe Ek julle as’t ware op die vlerke van ’n arend opgelig het en hier na My toe gedra het. As julle regtig gehoorsaam is aan My en vashou aan my verbond met julle, sal julle my persoonlike volk wees tussen al die nasies van die wêreld. Die hele wêreld behoort aan My, maar julle sal in besonder die nasie wees wat aan My toegewy is. Julle sal my koninkryk van priesters wees, ’n nasie wat die HERE dien.’ Dit is wat jy vir die Israeliete moet sê.”



Die HERE het toe vir Moses gesê: “Ek gaan in ’n swaar wolk na jou toe kom sodat die volk kan hoor hoe Ek met jou praat. Hulle sal jou dan altyd vertrou.”

Nadat Moses aan die HERE oorvertel het wat die volk alles gesê het, het die HERE vir hom gesê: “Gaan weer terug na die volk toe en berei hulle vandag en môre voor om My te ontmoet. Hulle moet hulle klere was. Hulle moet reg wees vir die derde dag, want op daardie dag gaan Ek die HERE voor hulle oë na die Sinaiberg toe afkom. Bakken die berg reg rondom af. Waarsku hulle: ‘Pas op! Moenie op die berg klim nie. Enigene wat in die afgebakende deel ingaan, sal beslis doodgemaak word. Niemand mag naby kom nie. As iemand dit doen, moet hy sonder meer met klippe doodgegooi word of met ’n pyl doodgeskiet word. Of dit nou ’n dier of ’n mens is, hy mag nie langer bly lewe nie.’ Wanneer die volk ’n trompet hoor blaas, moet hulle teen die berg

begin opklim.”

Moses is toe van die berg af na die volk toe. Hy het hulle gereed gekry om God te ontmoet. Hulle moes hulle klere was. Hy het vir hulle gesê: “Maak reg vir ’n belangrike gebeurtenis twee dae van nou af. Bly in hierdie tyd weg van seks af.”

Vroeg die oggend van die derde dag was daar donderslae en weerlig. ’n Dik wolk het oor die berg gehang. ’n Trompet het baie hard geblaas. Die volk in die laer was doodbang. Moses het die volk uit die kamp uitgelei om God te gaan ontmoet. Hulle het aan die voet van die berg gaan staan. Die hele Sinaiberg was toe onder die rook toe die HERE daarna toe afgekom het in ’n vuur. Die rook het die lug in geborrel soos rook uit ’n oond. Die hele berg het verskriklik geskud. Die trompet het al harder en harder geblaas. Moses het gepraat en God het hom met donderslae geantwoord.

Die HERE het toe afgekom na die top van die Sinaiberg toe en Moses na Hom toe geroep. Moses het toe teen die berg uitgeklim. Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Klim weer af en gaan waarsku die volk om nie in die afgebakende gebied in te gaan om na die HERE te kyk nie. Baie van hulle sal dan doodgaan. Selfs die priesters wat dikwels voor die HERE kom, moet hulle self eers voorberei, anders sal hulle doodgaan.”

Moses het toe vir die HERE gesê: “Die volk kan nie op die Sinaiberg klim nie. U het ons mos beveel om die berg af te sper en vir U af te sonder.”

Die HERE het hom geantwoord: “Klim af en bring Aäron saam met jou terug. Die priesters en die volk mag egter nie in die afgebakende gebied kom om hiernatoe op te klim nie. Ek sal hulle beslis straf.”

Moses het afgeklim en vir die volk gaan vertel wat die HERE vir hom gesê het.

Die volk het baie bang geword toe hulle hoor hoe die donderweer rammel, die trompet geblaas word en sien hoe die rook uit die berg borrel. Hulle het op ’n afstand gaan staan. Hulle sê toe vir Moses: “Jý moet maar liewer met ons praat. Ons sal na jou luister. Moenie dat God self met ons praat nie. Ons sal dan sterf.”

“Julle moenie bang wees nie,” het Moses vir hulle gesê. “God het so na julle toe gekom sodat julle ontsag vir Hom kan hê. Sorg dat julle nie teen Hom oortree nie.”

Terwyl die volk op ’n afstand bly staan het, het Moses ingegaan in die donker wolk waarin God was.

Op die wolkbedekte Sinaiberg, oorhandig God die tien mees

aangehaalde en bekendste reëls wat die mensdom al ooit gehoor het – reguit, op die man af reëls vir hoe die Israeliete met God (gebod 1-4) en met mense (gebod 5-10) moet omgaan.

“Ek is die HERE jou God. Dit is Ek wat jou bevry het uit Egipte waar jy ’n slaaf was.

“Jy mag nie nog ander gode buiten My aanbid nie.

“Jy mag nie vir jouself afgode maak wat soos voëls of diere of visse lyk nie. Jy mag nie voor hulle kniel om hulle te aanbid nie. Ek, die HERE jou God, is jou enigste God. Ek laat die oortredings van dié wat My haat nie ongestraf verbygaan nie. Ek straf die derde en die vierde geslag daarna vir die sondes wat hulle ouers gedoen het. My liefde bly egter duisend geslagte lank staan vir almal wat My liefhet en aan My gehoorsaam is.

“Moenie die Naam van die HERE jou God sonder rede gebruik nie. Die HERE sal die een wat sy Naam sonder die nodige respek gebruik, nie net so sonder straf laat wegkom nie.

“Onthou om die Sabbatdag vir God te vier. Ses dae lank kan jy met jou daaglikse werk aangaan. Die sewende dag is die HERE jou God se rusdag. Niemand in jou huis mag op daardie dag aangaan met gewone werk nie. Dit sluit in: jy, jou seuns en dogters, jou manlike en vroulike slawe, die vee wat aan jou behoort en alle buitelanders wat by jou oorbly. Die HERE het in ses dae die hemel, die aarde, die see en alles wat daarin is, gemaak. Op die sewende dag het Hy tot rus gekom. Om daardie rede het die HERE die sewende dag geseën en vir Homself eenkant gesit as sy heilige dag.

“Behandel jou ouers met respek. Jy sal dan lank en gelukkig lewe in die land wat die HERE vir jou gee om in te bly.

“Moenie mense doodmaak nie.

“Moenie egbreuk pleeg nie.

“Moenie iets steel nie.

“Moenie valse verklarings oor ander aflê nie.

“Jy moenie afgunstig raak op ’n ander se eiendom nie. Jy moenie sy vrou, sy manlike of vroulike werkers, sy beeste of sy donkies of enigiets wat hy besit vir jouself begeer nie.”

Moses was duidelik die tussenganger tussen God en die Hebreëuse mense. Nadat Moses die Tien Gebooie gekry het, het hy ook die wette van die Boek van die Verbond gekry – dit het meestal bestaan uit uitbreidings op die Tien Gebooie. Nou sou hy die Israeliete lei om hulle eie verbond met die Here te vorm.

Moses het na die volk toe afgegaan en vir hulle alles gesê wat die HERE beveel het. Hulle het soos een man geantwoord: “Ons sal alles doen wat die HERE gesê het!” Moses het alles wat die HERE vir hom gesê het, neergeskryf.

Hy het vroeg die volgende oggend opgestaan en ’n altaar aan die voet van die berg gaan bou. Hy het rondom die altaar twaalf klippe ingeplant. Dit was vir die twaalf stamme van Israel. Daarna het hy jong Israeliete laat kom en hulle beveel om bulle vir die HERE te offer. Dit was brandoffers en vrede-offers vir die HERE. Hy het ’n deel van die offerdiere se bloed in houers opgevang. Die ander helfte het hy oor die altaar gesprinkel. Daarna het Moses die Boek van die Verbond gevat en vir die volk daaruit gelees. Hulle het weer almal soos een man geantwoord: “Ons sal alles doen wat die HERE gesê het! Ons sal daarna luister!”

Moses het toe van die bloed in die houers gevat en oor die volk gesprinkel. Hy het gesê: “Hierdie bloed bevestig die verbond wat die HERE met julle gesluit het toe Hy hierdie woorde vir julle gesê het.”

Die HERE sê toe vir Moses: “Klim op na My toe hier op die berg. Bly hier. Ek wil vir jou plat klippe gee waarop Ek die wette en gebooie geskryf het wat jy vir die volk moet leer.”

Moses het daarna teen die berg uitgeklim. Die wolk het oor die berg gehang. Die wonderlike teenwoordigheid van die HERE was op Sinai. Die wolk het ses dae lank oor die berg gehang. Op die sewende dag het die HERE uit die wolk na Moses geroep. Vir die Israeliete onderkant die berg het dit gelyk soos ’n vuur wat bo-op die berg brand. Moses het verder teen die berg uitgeklim en in die wolk verdwyn. Hy was altesaam 40 dae en 40 nagte lank daar bo-op die berg.

Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Sê vir die Israeliete dat elkeen wat graag wil vir My ’n offer kan bring.

“Die Israeliete moet vir My ’n heiligdom maak waarin Ek tussen hulle kan kom woon. Jy moet hierdie tabernakel en al sy toebehore maak volgens die plan wat Ek vir jou gaan wys.”

Saam met die Tien Gebooie en ander wette het God ook vir Moses instruksies gegee oor hoe hy die Israeliete se aanbidding moet organiseer. Van daardie tyd af sou God se teenwoordigheid in die tabernakel wees, ’n draagbare tent van aanbidding. Binne-in die tabernakel was die kwtig ontwerpte verbondsark waarin die

klip Tafels met die Tien Gebooië gebêre is.

God het beveel dat die priesters wat die dienste, rituele offers en ander belangrike aanbiddingsaktiwiteite sou behartig, hulleself moes afsonder. Een dag elke week – die Sabbat – is opsy gesit om God te aanbid en om te rus van take en besigheid.

Moses was vir amper ses weke op die berg. Intussen het die mense onder in die vallei baie ongeduldig geword ... dit sou Moses se terugkoms baie bitter maak.

Toe die volk sien dat Moses lank wegbly en nie van die berg afkom nie, het hulle na Aäron toe gegaan. Hulle het vir hom gesê: “Maak vir ons ’n god wat ons kan lei. Ons weet nie wat van hierdie man Moses geword het wat ons uit Egipte weggelei het nie.”

Aäron het toe vir hulle gesê: “Haal julle vroue en seuns en dogters se goue ringe van hulle ore af en bring dit hier vir my.” Almal van die volk het toe die goue ringe afgehaal en dit vir Aäron gebring. Aäron het dit by hulle gevat, dit gesmelt en daarvan ’n kalf gemaak wat uit goud gegiet is. Die volk sê toe: “Israel, hier is jou god wat jou uit Egipte bevry het!”

Toe Aäron dit sien, het hy ook ’n altaar voor die kalf gebou. Hy het aangekondig: “Ons hou môre ’n fees vir die HERE!” Van vroeg die volgende oggend af het hulle brandoffers en vrede-offers gebring. Die volk het geëet en gedrink. Dit het later begin hand uitruk.

Die HERE het toe vir Moses gesê: “Klim dadelik van die berg af! Die volk wat jy uit Egipte bevry het, is besig om lelike dinge te doen. Hulle het van die koers afgewyk wat Ek vir hulle gewys het. Hulle het vir hulle ’n kalf gemaak wat hulle aanbid en waarvoor hulle offer. Hulle sê daarvoor: ‘Hier is jou god wat jou uit Egipte bevry het, Israel!’”

Die HERE sê toe vir Moses: “Ek het nou gesien dat hierdie volk hulle eie kop gaan volg. Moenie My nou keer nie. Laat staan My dat Ek my woede op hulle kan uithaal en hulle uitwis. Ek sal eerder van jou ’n groot nasie maak.”

Maar Moses het by die HERE gepleit om dit nie te doen nie. Hy het vir die HERE gevra: “HERE, waarom sal U nou u woede uithaal op u volk wat U met groot krag en sterk mag uit Egipte bevry het? Waarom sal U die Egiptenaars kans gee om te sê: ‘Hulle God het hulle om die bos gelei. Hy het hulle bevry sodat Hy hulle tussen die berge kon uitwis en van die aarde af laat verdwyn?’ Moet tog asseblief nie kwaad word nie. Sien af daarvan en moenie hierdie ramp oor hulle laat kom nie. Onthou tog dat U ’n ooreenkoms gesluit het met u dienaars

Abraham, Isak en Jakob. U het vir hulle belowe: ‘Ek sal julle nageslag so baie maak soos die sterre in die lug. Ek sal hierdie hele land vir julle nageslag gee om vir altyd in te woon.’” Die HERE het toe afgesien van die ramp wat Hy oor sy volk wou bring.

Daarna het Moses omgedraai en van die berg afgeklim. Hy het die klippe waarop die verbond geskryf was in sy hand gehou. Dit was op albei kante, voor en agter, geskryf. Dit was God se eie handewerk. Hy het self daarop geskryf.

Toe Josua hoor hoe die volk tekere gaan, het hy vir Moses gesê: “Dit klink of daar oorlog in die kamp is!”

Moses het geantwoord:

“Nee, dis nie die gejuig van oorwinning nie;

ook nie die gekerm van verloorders nie.

Dis die lawaai van feesviering wat ek hoor!”

Toe hulle nader aan die kamp kom, het Moses die kalf en die gedansery gesien. Hy het so kwaad geword dat hy die klippe op die grond neergegooi het. Dit het daar by die voet van die berg in stukke gebreek. Hy het toe die beeld van die kalf wat hulle gemaak het in die vuur gegooi. Toe dit afgekoel het, het hy dit fyngemaal. Hy het die poeier in water gegooi en die Israeliete gedwing om dit te drink.

Hy vra toe vir Aäron: “Wat het die volk dan aan jou gedoen dat jy hulle so ’n groot sonde laat doen het?”

“Moenie kwaad word nie,” het Aäron geantwoord. “Jy weet self hoe gereed is hierdie volk om kwaad te doen. Hulle het vir my kom sê: ‘Maak vir ons ’n god wat ons kan lei. Ons weet nie wat geword het van hierdie Moses wat ons uit Egipte gelei het nie.’ Ek het toe vir hulle gesê: ‘Haal af julle goue oorringe en bring dit vir my.’ Ek het dit by hulle gevat en in die vuur gegooi en siedaar, hierdie kalf kom toe uit die vuur!”

Moses het besef dat Aäron toegelaat het dat die volk hand uitruk. Hulle was ’n bespotting vir hulle vyande. Moses het by die ingang van die laer gaan staan en hardop uitgeroep: “Almal wat aan die HERE se kant is, kom staan hier by my!” Al die Leviete het by hom gaan staan.

Hy het vir hulle gesê: “Die HERE, die God van Israel, sê: ‘Elkeen moet sy swaard vat en van hoek tot kant almal in die kamp doodmaak, of dit nou broer, vriend of familielid is.’” Die Leviete het net so gemaak soos Moses gesê het. Ongeveer 3 000 mans het daardie dag gesterf. Moses het toe vir die Leviete gesê: “Julle het vandag julleself aan die HERE toegewy. Julle het gedoen wat Hy gesê het, selfs

al het dit beteken dat julle julle eie seuns en broers moes doodmaak. Die HERE sal julle seën.”

Die volgende dag het Moses vir die volk wat oor was gesê: “Julle het verskriklik oortree. Ek sal egter weer opklim na die HERE toe. Miskien kry ek dit reg dat Hy julle vergewe vir die sonde wat julle gedoen het.”

Moses het toe teruggegaan na die HERE toe. Hy het vir Hom gesê: “Ag tog, HERE, hierdie volk het ’n verskriklike sonde gedoen. Hulle het vir hulle ’n afgod van goud gemaak. Wil U nie maar asseblief hulle sonde vergewe nie? As U nie wil nie, moet U tog maar my naam uitvee uit die boek waarin U dit opgeteken het.”

Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Ek sal net die name van dié wat teen My oortree het, uitvee uit die boek. Gaan nou en gaan lei die volk na die plek wat Ek vir jou gesê het. My engel sal voor jou uitgaan. Ek sal met hulle wat gesondig het, afreken op die dag wanneer Ek hulle tot rekenskap roep.”

Die HERE het ’n groot ramp oor die volk laat kom omdat hulle die kalf aanbid het wat Aäron vir hulle gemaak het.

Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Jy en die volk wat jy uit Egipte gelei het, moet nou maar van hier af verder trek. Gaan na die land wat Ek aan Abraham, Isak en Jakob beloof het. Toe het Ek belowe dat Ek hierdie land vir hulle nageslag sal gee. Ek sal ’n engel voor julle uitstuur. Ek sal die Kanaäniete, Amoriete, Hetiete, Feresiete, Hewiete en Jebusiete wat daar bly, uit die land verdryf. Dit is ’n baie vrugbare land. Ek sal egter nie verder saam met julle trek nie. Julle is ’n eiesinnige volk. As Ek saamgaan, sal Ek julle dalk vernietig.”

Moses het ’n tent ’n hele ent weg van die laer af opgeslaan. Hy het dit “die ontmoetingstent” genoem. As iemand by die HERE raad gesoek het, het hy na die ontmoetingstent buite die kamp gegaan. Wanneer Moses uit die kamp na die tent toe gegaan het, het al die mense by die ingang van hulle tente gaan staan. Hulle het Moses agternagestaar tot hy in die tent van ontmoeting ingegaan het. Die oomblik wanneer hy die tent binnegegaan het, het die wolkkolom afgesak. Dit het oor die deur van die tent bly hang terwyl die HERE daar met Moses gepraat het. Wanneer die volk die wolkkolom oor die tent se deur sien hang het, het hulle opgestaan en by die ingang van hulle tente gekniel om die HERE te aanbid. Binne-in die tent het die HERE met Moses gepraat soos vriende wat gesels en mekaar in die oë kyk. Wanneer Moses daarna weer na die kamp toe teruggekom het, het Josua die seun van Nun wat hom gehelp het, daar agtergebly. Hy het nie van die tent af

weggegaan nie.

Op 'n keer het Moses vir die HERE gesê: “U het vir my gesê om hierdie volk te lei na die land wat U aan hulle beloof het. U het egter nooit vir my gesê wie U saam met my gaan stuur nie. U het wel vir my gesê dat U my baie goed ken en dat ek u goedkeuring wegdra. As dit dan so is, sê asseblief wat u planne is sodat ek kan weet wat U van my verwag. Hierdie mense is tog u eie volk.”

Hy vra toe vir Moses: “Moet Ek dan self saamgaan sodat jou hart kan rus?”

Moses sê vir Hom: “As U nie self saamgaan nie, moet U ons nie eers 'n tree van hier af laat beweeg nie. As U nie saam met ons gaan nie, waaraan sal dit duidelik wees dat U vir my en u volk lief is? Hoe anders sal dit duidelik wees dat U anders oor ons voel as oor die ander volke op aarde?”

Die HERE het vir Moses geantwoord: “Goed, Ek sal doen wat jy gevra het. Jy dra my goedkeuring weg. Jy is my vriend.”

Toe vra Moses: “Kan ek nie maar u heerlikheid sien nie?”

Die HERE sê vir hom: “Ek sal jou iets van my goedheid laat sien en Ek sal jou my stem laat hoor wanneer Ek my Naam ‘die HERE’ uitroep. Ek gee genade aan dié wat Ek wil; en ontferming aan dié wat Ek wil.” Hy sê toe vir hom: “Jy durf nie my gesig sien nie. Geen mens sal bly leef as hy sien hoe die HERE lyk nie.”

Die HERE sê verder vir hom: “Kom staan by hierdie rotse, hier by My. Wanneer Ek in my majesteit hier verbykom, sal Ek jou tussen die rotse laat staan en jou met my hand beskerm terwyl Ek verbygaan. Wanneer Ek verby is, sal Ek my hand wegvat en dan sal jy My van agter kan sien. Niemand mag My van voor af sien nie.”

Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Kry twee plat klippe gereed. Ek sal weer al die woorde wat op die klippe was wat jy stukkend gegooi het, daarop skryf. Wees môre-oggend vroeg gereed daarmee sodat jy die berg kan uitklim. Kry My bo-op die berg. Niemand anders mag saam met jou teen die berg uitklim nie. Daar mag nêrens op die berg iemand anders wees nie. Daar mag selfs nie enige beeste of vee teen die berg wei nie.”

Moses het toe twee plat klippe soos die eerstes gereed gekry. Hy het vroeg die oggend opgestaan en teen die berg begin uitklim, soos die HERE vir hom gesê het. Hy het die twee plat klippe in sy hande gedra. Die HERE kom toe in 'n wolk af, gaan staan by Moses en roep hardop sy eie Naam, “die HERE”, uit. Terwyl Hy by Moses verbybeweeg, het Hy uitgeroep: “Ek is die HERE. Ek is 'n God wat barmhartig en genadig

is. Ek het geduld met mense. Ek is lojaal. Ek bly getrou. Ek bly vol liefde oor al die geslagte. Ek vergeef alles wat hulle verkeerd gedoen het. Ek laat sonde egter nie sommer verbygaan nie. Ek straf selfs die kinders tot in die derde en vierde geslag daarna vir die sonde wat hulle voorouers gedoen het.”

Moses het diep vooroor gebuig en begin bid. Hy het gesê: “As ek dan regtig u goedkeuring geniet, Here, trek dan verder saam met ons. Dit is wel ’n eiesinnige volk hierdie, maar vergeef ons tog ons sonde en ons oortredings. Aanvaar ons tog as u eiendom.”

Die HERE sê toe: “Goed, Ek sluit met julle ’n ooreenkoms. Ek sal voor die hele volk wonderlike dinge laat gebeur wat nog nêrens op aarde of voor enige volk gebeur het nie. Al die volke sal sien wat die HERE kan doen. Ek sal wonderlike dinge met julle laat gebeur.

“Julle mag geen ander god behalwe die HERE aanbid nie. Hy is ’n God wat volle getrouheid vereis.”

Die HERE het ook vir Moses gesê: “Skryf alles neer wat Ek vir jou sê. Dit is die bepalings van my verbond met Israel.” Moses was daar bo-op die berg by die HERE vir 40 dae en 40 nagte. Hy het gedurende daardie tyd niks geëet of gedrink nie. Hy het die Tien Gebooie van God se ooreenkoms op die plat klippe geskryf.

Moses het van Sinaiberg afgeklim met die twee plat klippe waarop die bepalings van die verbond geskryf was in sy hande. Toe hy afklim, het hy nie geweet dat sy gesig blink omdat God met hom gepraat het nie. Aäron en die Israeliete het gesien hoe sy gesig blink en was bang om naby hom te kom. Moses het hulle egter nadergeroep. Toe Aäron en die leiers naderkom, het hy met hulle begin praat. Die hele volk het nadergekom, en Moses het alles oorvertel wat die HERE vir hom op Sinaiberg gesê het.

Nadat Moses met hulle gepraat het, het hy ’n doek oor sy kop gegooi. Elke keer wanneer Moses met die HERE in die tent gaan praat het, het hy die doek afgehaal tot hy weer teruggekom het. Dan het hy alles aan die Israeliete gerapporteer wat die HERE vir hom gesê het. Die Israeliete het sy gesig sien blink. Hy het daarom weer die doek oor sy kop gegooi totdat hy weer met die HERE gaan praat het.

Moses het God se wonderlike teenwoordigheid ervaar, en dit was duidelik sigbaar. God sou nou afkom en tussen sy mense in die tabernakel kom bly. Hierdie heilige tent het ’n plek verskaf vir die rituele offers en reiniging van sonde wat God vereis het. Die beste

Hebreeuse vakmanne het hulle vaardighede in houtwerk, metaalwerk, weefwerk en borduurwerk gebruik om materiaal vir die tabernakel te maak, insluitend die lampstaanders, die tafel vir die heilige brood en die verbondsark. Die ark is met goud oorgetrek, met pale van akasihout, wat ook met goud oorgetrek is, vir vervoer. Die spesifikasies vir al hierdie materiaal was baie gedetailleerd en die resultate moes voorwaar pragtig gewees het. Tog was die wonderlikste en belangrikste kenmerk van hierdie draagbare tempel nie die meubels wat daarin gestaan het nie, maar die Persoon wat dit gevul het.

Toe het die wolk afgesak en oor die tabernakel gehang. Die heerlike teenwoordigheid van die HERE het die tent gevul. Moses kon nie langer in die tabernakel kom nie, want die wolk was oor die tabernakel en die teenwoordigheid van die HERE het dit gevul.

Wanneer die wolk van die tabernakel af opgelig en begin beweeg het, het die Israeliete geweet dat hulle verder moes trek. As die wolk nie opgelig en begin beweeg het nie, het hulle net daar gebly. Die wolk van die HERE het gedurende die dag oor die tent gehang en snags was daar vuur oor die tabernakel. So het dit dwarsdeur Israel se reis gegaan.

Gedurende die jaar waarin die Israeliete naby Sinaiberg kampeer het, het God vir hulle geleer wie Hy is en wat Hy van hulle vereis: “Ek is heilig; daarom is julle heilig.” God het sy mense geleer om spesifieke offers na die tabernakel te bring – brandoffers, graanoffers, vrede-offers, sonde-offers en skuldooffers. Die priesters is gesalf en ’n ingewikkelde stelsel van diere-offers is ingestel vir die versoening van mense se sondes.

Die Hebreërs het God se wette oor die huwelik en egskeiding, geskikte seksuele verhoudings, straf vir moord en diefstal en hoe om vergoeding vir verkeerde dade te doen, geleer. God het verlang dat sy kinders deernisvol, genadig en regverdig moet word.

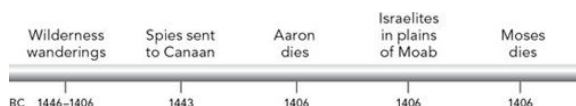
Die belofte aan Abraham, Isak en Jakob was nou ’n realiteit. En hierdie nuwe nasie sou anders wees sodat die hele wêreld die een ware God, die bron van lewe en hoop, sou ken en aanbid.

Wandering

ON THE TWENTIETH DAY of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the covenant law. Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran. They set out, this first time, at the LORD's command through Moses.

The people marched out from their yearlong campout near Mount Sinai in organized units, grouped according to the 12 tribes (named after the 12 sons of Jacob). God continued to guide them with the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He had rescued his people from slavery, showed them his power, guided their steps, given them his law and gifted them with his presence. By now, perhaps the people would trust God and his leading. But the Israelites continued to blame God for their hardships.

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the LORD and the fire died down. So that place was called Taberah,¹ because fire from the LORD had burned among them.



The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost — also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into loaves. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.

Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the LORD, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me — if I have found favor in your eyes — and do not let me face my own ruin.”

The LORD said to Moses:

“Tell the people: ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, “If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!” Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month — until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it — because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?”’”

But Moses said, “Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’ Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?”

The LORD answered Moses, “Is the LORD’s arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you.”

Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove quail in from the sea. It scattered them up to two cubits deep all around the camp, as far as a day’s walk in any direction. All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp. But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague. Therefore the place was named

Kibroth Hattaavah,² because there they buried the people who had craved other food.

Though God had dealt harshly with the people's lack of faith, soon there was more trouble in the ranks, this time from Moses' own sister and brother.

Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. “Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” And the LORD heard this.

(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, “Come out to the tent of meeting, all three of you.” So the three of them went out. Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When the two of them stepped forward, he said, “Listen to my words:

“When there is a prophet³ among you,
I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions,
I speak to them in dreams.

But this is not true of my servant Moses;
he is faithful in all my house.

With him I speak face to face,
clearly and not in riddles;
he sees the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid
to speak against my servant Moses?”

The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.

When the cloud lifted from above the tent, Miriam’s skin was leprous — it became as white as snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had a defiling skin disease, and he said to Moses, “Please, my lord, I ask you not to hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its

mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."

So Moses cried out to the LORD, "Please, God, heal her!"

The LORD replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back." So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.

After that, the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of Paran.

The LORD said to Moses, "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders."

When Moses sent them to explore Canaan, he said, "Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land." (It was the season for the first ripe grapes.)

So they went up and explored the land from the Desert of Zin as far as Rehob, toward Lebo Hamath.

When they reached the Valley of Eshkol, they cut off a branch bearing a single cluster of grapes. Two of them carried it on a pole between them, along with some pomegranates and figs.

At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land.

They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there."

Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

But the men who had gone up with him said, “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”

That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them.”

But the whole assembly talked about stoning them. Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the Israelites. The LORD said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they.”

Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. And they will tell the inhabitants of this land about it. They have already heard

that you, LORD, are with these people and that you, LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. If you put all these people to death, leaving none alive, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, ‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath, so he slaughtered them in the wilderness.’

“Now may the Lord’s strength be displayed, just as you have declared: ‘The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.’ In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.”

The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times — not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea.”

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: “How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: In this wilderness your bodies will fall — every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. For forty years — one

year for each of the forty days you explored the land — you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.’ I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this wilderness; here they will die.”

Grumbling, complaining, plotting, unbelieving—the Hebrews were slow learners. As God declared, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness until the people 20 years old or more at the time died.

The story picks up again nearly 40 years later. The Israelites return to Kadesh, site of the rebellion that occurred when the spies returned from Canaan. The promised land lies before them again. By now, most of the people 20 years old or more at the time of that tragic rebellion had died. Sadly, however, the attitude of this generation clearly resembles that of the previous one.

In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.

Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses and said, “If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD’s community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!”

Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. The LORD said to Moses, “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.”

So Moses took the staff from the LORD’s presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” Then Moses raised his arm and

struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”

These were the waters of Meribah, where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD and where he was proved holy among them.

The frustration and anger that had built up in Moses over the last 40 years came to expression. In his rage, Moses struck the rock rather than obeying God’s instructions to speak to it. Moses (and evidently Aaron) demonstrated a lack of trust in God and respect for his presence among his people. The consequences were clear: neither Moses nor Aaron would enter the promised land.

As the Israelites continued their march to Canaan, they came to the edge of territory controlled by their distant cousins, the Edomites (descended from Esau, Jacob’s brother). But their foreign policy negotiations proved to be difficult. They requested permission for passage, a shortcut, across that land. “No way, not without a fight,” replied the king of Edom, who promptly sent a large and powerful army to ensure they didn’t enter his territory. Thwarted, the Israelites soon had other sad events to attend to.

The whole Israelite community set out from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor. At Mount Hor, near the border of Edom, the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. Get Aaron and his son Eleazar and take them up Mount Hor. Remove Aaron’s garments and put them on his son Eleazar, for Aaron will be gathered to his people; he will die there.”

Moses did as the LORD commanded: They went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community. Moses removed Aaron’s garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain, and when the whole community learned that Aaron had died, all the Israelites mourned for him thirty days.

When the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming along the road to Atharim, he attacked the Israelites and captured some of them. Then Israel made this vow to the LORD: “If you will deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities.” The LORD listened to Israel’s plea and gave the Canaanites over to them. They completely destroyed them and their towns; so the place was named Hormah.⁴

They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us.” So Moses prayed for the people.

The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

The Israelites traveled on through the dusty wilderness. As they had done with the nation of Edom, they requested cooperation from the king of the Amorites to pass through their land. And as with the Edomites, God’s people found that the Amorites were less than helpful.

Israel sent messengers to say to Sihon king of the Amorites:

“Let us pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the King’s Highway until we have passed through your territory.”

But Sihon would not let Israel pass through his territory. He mustered his entire army and marched out into the wilderness against Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he fought with Israel. Israel, however, put him to the sword and took over his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, but only as far as the Ammonites, because their border was

fortified. Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and occupied them, including Heshbon and all its surrounding settlements. Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken from him all his land as far as the Arnon.

So Israel settled in the land of the Amorites.

After Moses had sent spies to Jazer, the Israelites captured its surrounding settlements and drove out the Amorites who were there. Then they turned and went up along the road toward Bashan, and Og king of Bashan and his whole army marched out to meet them in battle at Edrei.

The LORD said to Moses, “Do not be afraid of him, for I have delivered him into your hands, along with his whole army and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon.”

So they struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army, leaving them no survivors. And they took possession of his land.

With results such as this, local kings were intimidated by Israel's forces. One king, Balak, ruler of Moab, called on a pagan diviner, Balaam, to curse the Israelites. Caught between assurances of wealth from Balak and God's command not to curse them, Balaam was in a dilemma. He finally mounted his donkey to head out to Moab, but the donkey refused to move. Balaam tried his whip, and the donkey suddenly talked, objecting to unfair treatment.

Donkey: “Did I ever hurt you?” Balaam: “No.”

Donkey: “So why are you whipping me?” Balaam: “Because you're not moving, you stupid animal.” Donkey: “Open your eyes and see why!” Then Balaam saw the angel of the Lord in the road, opposing him. As a result of this strange occurrence, Balaam gained the courage he needed to tell Balak what God wanted him to hear: Israel would be blessed; Moab would be cursed.

In the meantime, Moabite women were doing more damage to Hebrew solidarity than Balak's army ever could.

While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them.

The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the LORD's fierce anger may turn away from Israel."

So Moses said to Israel's judges,⁵ "Each of you must put to death those of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor."

Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman's stomach. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.

The LORD said to Moses, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites."

As the battle for the promised land approached, Moses took a census and discovered that all the Israelites who had rebelled against God's instruction to enter Canaan nearly 40 years earlier had passed away. After all these years, the next generation was finally poised to enter the land. But Moses himself had to face the sad reality of some tough consequences.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go up this mountain in the Abarim Range and see the land I have given the Israelites. After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was,

for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes.” (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)

Moses said to the LORD, “May the LORD, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.”

So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him.”

Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses.

Many administrative details required Moses’ attention before he died and the people crossed the Jordan River. How to arrange worship, how to handle captives and spoils from battle, how to deal with crime and vengeance inside the Hebrew nation, how to set up inheritance rights—God, through Moses, was preparing a basic governmental system for life in the promised land. Moses’ final task regarding the anxious and excited people was a grand valedictory speech. “Remember who you are,” he told them, “and to Whom you belong.”

These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan:

The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.

Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or

has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD is God; besides him there is no other. From heaven he made you hear his voice to discipline you. On earth he showed you his great fire, and you heard his words from out of the fire. Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence and his great strength, to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today.

Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the LORD promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.

Hear, Israel: You are now about to cross the Jordan to go in and dispossess nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities that have walls up to the sky. The people are strong and tall — Anakites! You know about them and have heard it said: “Who can stand up against the Anakites?” But be assured today that the LORD your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them; he will subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the LORD has promised you.

After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, “The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.” No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you. It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land; but on account of the wickedness of these nations, the LORD your God will drive them out before you, to accomplish what he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.

Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them:

Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those signs and great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. Yet the LORD says, “During the forty years that I led you through the wilderness, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet. You ate no bread and drank no wine or other fermented drink. I did this so that you might know that I am the LORD your God.”

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Though Moses often complained that he was not a public speaker, his strong words of encouragement kept the people faithful, focused and hopeful for many years. Moses knew God well, and he loved the people. That knowledge and love were often expressed in poetic prayers full of lament, joy, passion and devotion.

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

On that same day the LORD told Moses, “Go up into the Abarim Range to Mount Nebo in Moab, across from Jericho, and view Canaan, the land I am giving the Israelites as their own possession. There on the mountain that you have climbed you will die and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. This is because both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites. Therefore, you will see the land only from a distance;

you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel.”

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land — from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.”

And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt — to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

1Taberah: *Taberah* means “burning.”

2Kibroth Hattaavah: *Kibroth Hattaavah* means “graves of craving.”

3Prophet: A person selected by God to deliver divinely-inspired messages to his people.

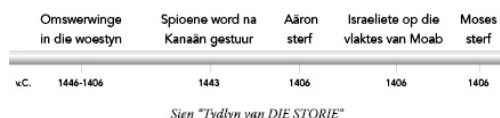
4Hormah: *Hormah* means “destruction.”

5Judges: National leaders and deliverers of Israel.

Omswerwinge

Op 'n dag in die middel van die lente het die wolk bo die tabernakel opgelig. Dit was op die twintigste in die tweede jaar na hulle uit Egipte weg is. Die Israeliete het opgepak en weggetrek uit die Sinaiwoestyn uit. Die wolk het toe in die Paranwoestyn gaan stilstaan. Dit was die eerste keer dat hulle op bevel van die HERE begin trek het. Hy het sy bevele vir hulle deur middel van Moses gegee.

Die mense het in georganiseerde eenhede, gegroeppeer volgens die twaalf stamme (vernoem na Jakob se twaalf seuns) weggetrek uit hulle kamp naby Sinaïberg waar hulle vir 'n jaar gebly het. God het hulle steeds in die dag met die wolkkolom en in die nag met die vuurkolom gelei. Hy het sy mense van slawerny bevry, vir hulle sy krag gewys, vir hulle sy wette gegee asook die grootste geskenk – sy teenwoordigheid. Die mense sal seker nou in God en sy leiding glo. Maar die Israeliete het God blameer vir al hulle swaarkry.



Die volk het by die HERE begin kla oor hulle swaarkry. Toe Hy dit hoor, het die Here kwaad geword. Vuur wat van die HERE af kom, het onder hulle uitgebreek. Dit het tot op die kant van die kamp gebrand. Hulle het na Moses geroep om hulle te help. Hy het tot die HERE gebid en die vuur het bedaar. Die plek is toe Tabera genoem, want vuur wat van die HERE af kom, het daar onder hulle gebrand.

'n Spul skobbejakke wat saamgetrek het, het 'n onbedaarlike lus vir vleis gekry. Die Israeliete het toe ook begin kerm: "Waar kan ons tog vleis kry? Ons onthou nog hoe ons net soveel vis kon eet soos ons wou in Egipte. Daar was komkommers en waatlemoene en prei en uie en knoffel. Maar nou stik ons aan die manna waarteen ons elke dag moet vaskyk!"

Die manna was soos koljandersaad. Dit het 'n vaal kleur gehad. Die

volk het uitgegaan en dit van die grond af opgetel. Hulle het dit dan tussen klippe gemaal of in 'n vysel stukkend gestamp. Daarna het hulle dit in 'n pot gekook en dan daarvan plaatkoeke gemaak. Dit het soos oliekoeke gesmaak. Die manna het saam met die dou gedurende die nag geval.

Moses het gehoor hoe die stamme van die volk by hulle tente se opening staan en mor. Die HERE het baie kwaad geword. Dit was vir Moses 'n baie verkeerde ding. Moses vra toe vir die HERE: “Waarom het U hierdie moeilikheid oor u dienaar, gebring? Waarom het U my met hierdie volk opgesaal? Is ek hierdie volk se pa? Het ek hulle gemaak dat U vir my sê: ‘Dra hulle in jou arms soos 'n oppasser 'n suigeling rond. Vat hulle na die land wat Ek vir hulle voorsate beloof het.’ Waar gaan ek vleis kry vir hierdie hele volk? Hulle kerm by my en hulle vra: ‘Gee vir ons vleis om te eet.’ Ek kan nie alleen hierdie hele volk versorg nie. Hulle is te veel vir my. As U dit van my verwag, maak my dan asseblief maar liewer dood as wat ek na hierdie ellende moet sit en kyk.”

Die HERE sê toe vir Moses:

“Sê vir die volk: Heilig julleself vir môre. Julle sal dan vleis kry om te eet. Die HERE het gehoor hoe julle kerm: Waar sal ons vleis kry om te eet? Ons was beter af in Egipte! Die HERE sal dan vir julle vleis gee om te eet. Julle sal nie net vir een dag vleis hê om te eet nie, ook nie net vir twee of vir vyf of vir tien of vir selfs twintig dae nie. Julle sal elke dag vir 'n hele maand lank vleis eet totdat dit by julle ore uitkom en julle daarvan begin naar word. Julle het die HERE, wat tussen julle woon, verwerp, want julle het by Hom gekla: ‘Waarom moes ons uit Egipte weggaan?’”

Moses het die HERE geantwoord: “Hier onder ons is daar 600 000 mans wat kan veg. En dan sê U nog: ‘Ek sal vir hulle vir 'n maand lank vleis gee om te eet.’ Sou dit genoeg wees as ons al die skape en die beeste vir hulle slag? Sou dit genoeg wees as ons al die visse van die see vir hulle bymeekaarmaak?”

Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Dink jy die HERE kan nie? Jy sal nou sien of Ek kan doen wat Ek sê of nie.”

Die HERE het toe 'n wind laat waai. Dit het kwartels van die see af oor die kamp gewaai. Hulle het reg rondom die kamp geval, omtrent 'n dagreis ver in alle rigtings en omtrent 'n meter diep. Die volk het uitgegaan en daardie hele dag en nag en ook nog die volgende dag kwartels bymeekaargemaak. Die minste wat enigteen bymeekaargemaak

het, was 50 houeure. Hulle het die voëls reg rondom die kamp oopgesprei. Nog voor hulle die vleis klaar geëet het, het die HERE se woede teen die volk losgebars. Die HERE het 'n baie groot siekte onder hulle laat uitbreek. Daardie plek se naam het “Kibrot-Taäwa” geword. Daar is die mense begrawe wat so lus vir vleis geword het.

Alhoewel God baie streng opgetree het oor sy mense se gebrek aan geloof was daar binnekort weer moeilikheid onder die geledere, hierdie keer van Moses se eie broer en suster.

Mirjam en Aäron het begin om van Moses sleg te praat omdat hy met 'n Kussitiese vrou getrou het. Hulle het gesê: “Die HERE praat beslis nie net deur Moses nie. Hy praat ook deur ons.” Die HERE het gehoor wat hulle sê.

Moses was buitengewoon nederig, meer as enige ander mens op aarde.

Die HERE het dringend met Moses, Aäron en Mirjam gepraat: “Julle drie moet na die tabernakel toe gaan.” Die drie is toe soontoe. Die HERE het in 'n wolkmassa daarnatoe afgekom en by die ingang van die tabernakel gaan staan. Hy het Aäron en Mirjam nadergeroep. Die twee het nadergekom. Die HERE het gesê: “Luister wat Ek sê!

“As daar 'n profeet onder julle is,
maak Ek, die HERE, My aan hom bekend deur gesigte
en praat Ek met hom deur drome.
Ek maak nie so met Moses my dienaar nie.
Hy is die betroubaarste van al my mense.
Ek praat direk met hom, van aangesig tot aangesig.
Ek praat nie met hom op 'n raaiselagtige manier nie.
Hy weet hoe die HERE lyk.
Moet julle dan nie baie versigtig
oor my dienaar Moses praat nie?”

Die HERE was kwaad vir hulle en Hy het weggegaan.

Toe die wolk weg van die tabernakel af beweeg het, was Mirjam skielik so wit soos sneeu oor haar hele lyf. Toe Aäron sien hoe wit Mirjam van die melaatsheid is, het hy vir Moses gesê: “Meneer, moet ons asseblief nie straf vir die dom ding wat ons gedoen het nie. Moenie toelaat dat sy soos een is wat doodgebore word en waarvan die liggaam alreeds ontbind is by geboorte nie.”

Moses het hardop na die HERE geroep: “O God, laat sy asseblief tog

gesond word!”

Die HERE sê toe vir Moses: “As haar pa haar in die gesig gespoeg het, sou sy sewe dae lank die vernedering daarvan moes dra. Verban haar nou vir sewe dae lank uit die kamp uit. Eers daarna mag sy terugkom.” Mirjam moes toe sewe dae lank buite die kamp bly. Die volk het nie verder getrek voordat Mirjam weer terug was by hulle nie.

Die volk is daarna weg van Gaserot af. Hulle het in die Paranwoestyn gaan kamp opslaan.

Die HERE het toe vir Moses gesê: “Stuur mans uit om die land Kanaän te gaan verken wat Ek aan die Israeliete gaan gee. Stuur van elke stam een van hulle leiers uit.”

Toe hy hulle uitstuur om die land Kanaän te gaan verken, het Moses vir hulle gesê: “Gaan van hier af regdeur die Negevwostyn noord na die heuwelgebied. Kyk hoe die land is. Kyk of die inwoners sterk of swak is, of hulle min of baie is. Kyk of die land waarin hulle woon goed of sleg is. Kyk of die dorpe waarin hulle woon oop is en of dit met mure versterk is. Let op of die grond ryk of arm is, boomryk is of nie. Wees dapper en bring van die vrugte van die land saam terug.” Dit was juis in die tyd toe die eerste druiwe geoes is.

Hulle het toe die land gaan verken, van die Sinwoestyn af deur tot by Regob by Lebo-Hamat.

Hulle het daarna by die Eskolspruit aangekom. Daar het hulle ’n tros druiwe gepluk. Hulle moes dit aan ’n stok tussen twee van hulle dra. Hulle het daar ook granate en vye gepluk.

Aan die einde van die 40 dae het die mans van die verkenningstog af teruggekom.

Hulle het by Moses, Aäron en die Israeliete aangekom waar hulle by Kades in die Paranwoestyn staan. Hulle het aan die Israeliete verslag gedoen en vir hulle die vrugte gewys wat hulle saamgebring het. Die mans het aan Moses rapporteer: “Ons het na die land gaan kyk waarheen jy ons gestuur het. Dit is ’n baie vrugbare land. Hier is van sy vrugte. Die mense wat in die land woon, is egter baie sterk. Hulle het groot stede met verdedigingsmure om. Ons het ook Enak se nageslag daar gesien.”

Kaleb het egter die volk probeer gerusstel. Hy het gesê: “Laat ons optrek en die land gaan oorneem. Ons is daartoe in staat.”

Die ander mans wat saam met hom gegaan het, het egter gesê: “Ons durf nie teen hulle optrek nie. Hulle is sterker as ons.” Hulle het toe ’n gerug begin versprei oor die land wat hulle gaan verken het: “Die land waarna ons gaan kyk het, is ’n land wat sy inwoners opeis. Al die volke wat ons daarin gesien het, is besonder groot mense. Ons het Enak se nageslag daar gesien. Hulle is reuse. Ons het voor hulle soos sprinkane gelyk.”

Die gemeenskap het toe begin kla. Die volk het deur die nag gesit en huil. Al die Israeliete het by Moses en Aäron kom kla. Hulle het gesê: “As ons tog maar liever in Egipte gesterf het, of selfs hier in die woestyn! Hoekom het die HERE ons na hierdie land toe laat kom om hier met die swaard doodgemaak te word? Ons vroue en ons dogters gaan nog oorlogsbuit word. Is dit nie beter dat ons maar liever na Egipte toe teruggaan nie?” Hulle het toe onder mekaar gekonkel: “Kom ons kies ’n leier en ons gaan terug na Egipte toe.”

Moses en Aäron het voor die gemeenskap van die Israeliete neergeval. Josua, seun van Nun, en Kaleb, seun van Jefunne, wat saam die land gaan verken het, het hulle klere geskeur. Hulle het vir die gemeenskap van die Israeliete gesê: “Die land wat ons gaan verken het, is ’n besondere mooi land. As die HERE ons liefhet, sal Hy ons in die land laat kom en dit vir ons gee. Dit is ’n baie vrugbare land. Moenie teen die HERE in opstand kom nie! Moenie bang wees vir die mense van die land nie. Hulle is ons slagoffers. Hulle het geen beskerming nie. Die HERE is met ons. Moenie bang wees nie!”

Die gemeenskap het egter gedreig om hulle met klippe dood te gooi. Die Israeliete het toe bewus geword van die HERE se magtige teenwoordigheid by die tabernakel. Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Hoe lank gaan hierdie volk nog aanhou om My te minag? Hoe lank gaan hulle bly weier om op My te vertrou, selfs al het Ek al die wonders tussen hulle laat gebeur? Ek gaan ’n pessiëkte onder hulle laat uitbreek. Ek gaan hulle uitroei. Ek gaan jou egter ’n groot nasie maak wat baie sterker is as hulle!”

Moses het toe vir die HERE gesê: “U het met u krag hierdie volk uit Egipte weggevat. Die Egiptenaars sal hoor wat U doen. Hulle sal dit vir die inwoners van hierdie land oorvertel. Hulle het alreeds gehoor dat U tussen die mense van hierdie volk bly. HERE, hulle weet dat U sigbaar is vir u volk in die wolk wat bo hulle hang. Hulle weet dat U die volk lei met ’n wolkmassa wat bedags voor hulle uitgaan en ’n vuurbondel wat snags voor hulle is. As U nou meteens hierdie volk man en muis uitwis, gaan die nasies wat van u beroemdheid gehoor

het, sê: ‘Omdat die HERE nie die volk na die land toe kon bring wat Hy vir hulle belowe het nie, het Hy hulle sommer daar in die woestyn doodgemaak.’

“Wys tog nou dat U so sterk is soos wat U gesê het. U het mos gesê: ‘Die HERE word nie gou kwaad nie. Sy liefde kan sonde en oortreding verdra. Hy laat sonde egter nie ongestraf bly nie. Hy hou dit wat die ouers verkeerd gedoen het nog teen die derde en vierde geslag daarna.’ Vergeef tog nou hierdie volk se sonde soos U in u groot liefde hulle verdra het vandat hulle uit Egipte uit weg is tot nou toe.”

Die HERE sê toe: “Ek sal hulle vergeef soos jy gevra het. Maar so seker as wat Ek leef en die aarde vol is van die HERE se groot mag, nie een van hierdie mans wat gesien het hoe groot Ek is en watter wondertekens Ek in Egipte en die woestyn gedoen het en wat My herhaaldelik getoets het deur nie na My te luister nie, nie een van hulle wat My verag het, sal in die land kom wat Ek aan hulle voorouers beloof het nie. My dienaar Kaleb het egter ’n ander gesindheid teenoor My gewys. Hy het by My bly staan. Ek sal hom in die land laat kom wat hy gaan verken het. Sy nageslag sal die land besit. Draai weg van die vlakke waar die Amalekiete en Kanaäniete bly. Gaan terug op die pad wat na die Rietsee toe loop.”

Die HERE het toe vir Moses en Aäron gesê: “Hoe lank gaan hierdie slegte gemeenskap bly kla oor My? Ek het gehoor wat die Israëliete oor My sê. Sê vir hulle: ‘So waar as Ek leef, sê die HERE, Ek gaan met julle alles laat gebeur waarvan julle My verdink het. Julle lyke sal hier in die woestyn lê. Nie een van julle bo twintig jaar oud wat in die sensus getel is en wat oor my gekla het, sal in die land kom wat Ek beloof het dat julle daarin sal woon nie. Net Kaleb, seun van Jefunne, en Josua, seun van Nun, sal ingaan. Julle het gesê dat julle kinders oorlogsbuit sal word. Ek sal hulle egter in die land laat kom en hulle sal die land beleef wat julle versmaai het. Maar julle lyke sal hierdie hele woestyn vol lê. Julle kinders sal die prys betaal vir julle ontrouheid. Hulle sal soos herders 40 jaar lank in die woestyn rondswerf totdat julle almal dood in die woestyn lê. Vir elkeen van die 40 dae wat julle die land verken het, sal julle vir julle oortreding betaal. Julle sal 40 jaar in die woestyn bly. Julle sal leer wat dit is om My as vyand te hê.’ Ek, die HERE, het dit gesê! Ek sal dit met elkeen laat gebeur wat teen my saamgesweer het. In hierdie selfde woestyn sal elkeen van hulle doodgaan!”

Morrend, klaend, konkeland, ongelowig – die Hebreërs leer maar stadig. Soos God verklaar het, het die Israëliete in die woestyn gereis

totdat die mense wat daardie tyd twintig jaar of ouer was, almal dood was.

Die storie word weer amper 40 jaar later voortgesit. Die Israeliete keer terug na Kades, die plek waar hulle gerebelleer het toe die spioene van Kanaän teruggekeer het. Die Beloofde Land lê weer voor hulle. Teen hierdie tyd is die meeste van die mense wat tydens daardie tragiese rebellie twintig jaar of ouer was, dood. Ongelukkig is die huidige generasie se houding maar dieselfde as die vorige een s'n.

Die Israeliete het in die vroeë lente in die Sinwoestyn aangekom. Hulle het by Kades kamp opgeslaan. Mirjam is daar dood en begrawe.

Daar was nie genoeg water vir die mense om te drink nie. Hulle het toe op Moses en Aäron toegesak. Hulle het in opstand gekom teen Moses en vir hom gesê: “Ons moes maar liever saam met die ander voor die HERE doodgegaan het! Hoekom het julle die HERE se mense na hierdie woestyn toe gelei sodat ons hier saam met ons vee kan doodgaan? Waarom het julle ons uit Egipte weggevat en ons na hierdie onleefbare plek gebring? Hier is nie landerye of vyeboom of granate nie. Hier is nie eers water om te drink nie!”

Moses en Aäron is van die mense af weg na die ingang van die tabernakel toe. Daar het hulle vooroor gekniel. Die magtige teenwoordigheid van die HERE het na hulle gekom. Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Gaan vat die stok voor die altaar. Jy en Aäron moet al die mense bymekaarkry. Terwyl hulle kyk, moet jy die rots beveel om water te gee. Daar sal genoeg water uit die rots kom sodat die mense en hulle diere hulle versadig kan drink.”

Moses het gemaak soos die HERE gesê het en die stok by die ark gaan haal. Moses en Aäron het die mense by die rots bymekaargekry. “Luister, julle opstandige mense,” het hy vir hulle gesê. “Moet daar vir julle water uit die rots kom?” Moses het sy hand opgelig en twee keer met die stok teen die rots geslaan. Daar het toe water uitgeborrel. Al die mense en hulle vee het gedrink totdat hulle versadig was.

Die HERE het vir Moses en Aäron gesê: “Julle het my nie genoeg vertrou om vir die Israeliete te wys hoe heilig Ek is nie. Jy sal daarom nie hierdie mense inlei in die land wat Ek vir julle sal gee nie.”

Vandaar die naam “Waters van Meriba”, want die Israeliete het daar met die HERE getwis. Daar het Hy vir hulle gewys hoe heilig Hy is.

Die frustrasie en woede wat oor die afgelope 40 jaar in Moses opgebou het, het tot uitbarsting gekom. In sy woede het Moses die rots

geslaan in plaas daarvan om God te gehoorsaam en net daarmee te praat. Moses (en waarskynlik Aäron) het 'n gebrek aan vertroue aan God en respek vir sy teenwoordigheid onder sy mense gedemonstreer. Die gevolge was duidelik: nie Moses of Aäron sou die Beloofde Land binnegaan nie.

Soos die Israeliete voortgegaan het met hulle reis na Kanaän het hulle die grens van 'n gebied bereik wat deur verlangse neefs van hulle beheer is, die Edomiete (uit die nageslag van Esau, Jakob se broer). Maar hulle buitelandse beleid-onderhandelinge was nie so suksesvol nie. Hulle het toestemming gevra vir deurgang, 'n kortpad, oor die land. "Nee, nie sonder 'n geveg nie," het die koning van Edom geantwoord en dadelik 'n groot en magtige weermag gestuur om te verseker dat hulle nie sy gebied binnekom nie. Met hulle planne gedwarsboom, moes die Israeliete binnekort aan ander hartseer gebeurtenisse aandag gee.

Hulle is toe weg van Kades af en die groep Israeliete het by die Horberg aangekom. By die Horberg, op die grens van Edom, het die HERE vir Moses en Aäron gesê: "Aäron gaan nou by sy vaders versamel word. Hy sal nie ingaan in die land wat Ek vir die Israeliete gaan gee nie. Julle twee wou mos nie na my luister by die water van Meriba nie. Vat nou vir Aäron en sy seun Eleasar saam met jou en klim uit teen die berg Hor. Trek Aäron se ampsklere uit. Trek dit dan vir sy seun Eleasar aan. Aäron sal daar sterf en met sy vaders verenig word."

Moses het gemaak soos die HERE gesê het. Terwyl die volk staan en kyk, het hulle teen die Horberg uitgeklim. Moses het Aäron se klere uitgetrek en sy seun Eleasar dit laat aantrek. Aäron het daar op die kruin van die berg gesterf. Moses en Eleasar het toe van die berg afgeklim. Toe die mense sien dat Aäron dood is, het die hele Israel 30 dae lank oor hom gerou.

Die Kanaänitiese koning van Arad het in die Negevwoestyn gewoon. Hy het gehoor dat die Israeliete in aantog was met die pad wat na Atarim loop. Hy het teen Israel geveg en van hulle mense gevange geneem. Die Israeliete het toe 'n gelofte aan God gedoen: "As U ons help om hierdie volk te oorwin, sal ons hulle stede uitwis." Die HERE het Israel se gebed verhoor. Hulle het die stede met die grond gelyk gemaak en die plek Gorma¹ genoem.

Hulle is van Gorma af weg met die pad na die Rietsee toe om by Edom verby te kom. Langs die pad het hulle ongeduldig begin word. Die volk het teenoor die HERE en Moses begin kla: "Waarom het jy ons uit Egipte laat trek om hier in die woestyn te sterf? Hier is nie kos en

water nie. Ons walg van die nuttelose manna!”

Die HERE het toe giftige slange onder die volk gestuur. Hulle het die volk gepik. Baie uit Israel is daarvan dood. Hulle het na Moses toe gekom en by hom bely: “Ons het ’n fout gemaak met wat ons teen jou en die HERE gesê het. Bid tog vir die HERE dat Hy die giftige slange van ons af sal wegvat.” Moses het toe namens die volk tot God gebid.

Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Maak vir jou ’n afbeelding van ’n giftige slang en sit dit bo-op ’n paal. Elkeen wat gepik is en daarna kyk, sal bly leef.” Moses het toe ’n slang van brons gemaak en dit bo-op ’n paal gesit. As ’n slang iemand gepik het, het hy na die bronslang gekyk en hy het bly leef.

Die Israeliete het verder deur die stowwerige woestyn getrek. Soos hulle met die nasie van Edom gedoen het, het hulle ook vir die koning van die Amoriëte toestemming gevra om deur hulle land te trek. En soos met die Edomiete, het God se mense ontdek dat die Amoriëte nie so behulpzaam sou wees nie.

Die Israeliete het boodskappers na Sihon, die koning van die Amoriëte, gestuur:

“Laat ons deur jou land trek. Ons sal nie afdraai na die veld, of na jou wingerde toe nie. Ons sal nie water uit jou putte drink nie. Ons sal reguit hou met die Hoofweg van die Konings totdat ons deur jou gebied is.”

Sihon wou Israel egter nie toelaat om deur sy gebied te trek nie. Hy het sy hele volk bymekaargekry en uitgetrek om Israel in die woestyn aan te val. Hy het by Jahas aangekom en daar teen Israel geveg. Die Israeliete het hom egter in die geveg verslaan. Hulle het sy land by hom afgevat vanaf die Arnonrivier tot by die Jabbokspruit teenaan die Ammoniete. Die Ammoniete het hulle gebied verdedig. Die Israeliete het al die stede van die Amoriëte ingeneem. Hulle het in Gesbon en die dorpe rondom gaan woon. Gesbon was die hoofstad van koning Sihon van die Amoriëte. Hy het met ’n vorige koning van Moab oorlog gemaak en sy hele land tot by die Arnonrivier van hom afgeneem.

Die Israeliete het toe in die gebied van die Amoriëte gaan woon.

Moses het mense uitgestuur om Jaser te gaan verken. Hulle het dit saam met sy omringende dorpies ingeneem en die Amoriëte verjaag wat daar gebly het. Hulle het omgedraai en in die rigting van Basan begin marsjeer. Og, die koning van Basan, het teen hulle uitgetrek om by Edreï teen hulle te veg.

Die HERE het toe vir Moses gesê: “Moenie vir hom bang wees nie. Ek gee vir jou die oorwinning oor hom en sy volk. Ek gee sy land vir jou. Jy sal met hom maak soos jy met Sihon, die koning van die Amoriete, wat in Gesbon gebly het, gemaak het.”

Hulle het toe vir hom en sy seuns en sy volk verslaan totdat daar nie een oorgebly het nie. Hulle het sy land oorgeneem.

Met resultate soos hierdie is plaaslike konings deur die Israeliete se kragte geïntimideer. Een koning, Balak, heerser oor Moab, het hom beroep op die heidense waarsêer, Bileam, om die Israeliete te vervloek. Bileam het hom in 'n dilemma bevind: aan die een kant het Balak hom rykdomme beloof en aan die ander kant het God hom opdrag gegee om die Israeliete nie te vervloek nie. Hy het uiteindelik op sy donkie geklim en na Moab gegaan, maar die donkie het geweier om te beweeg. Bileam het sy sweep probeer, en toe begin die donkie skielik praat, hy het beswaar gemaak teen die onregverdigde behandeling.

Donkie: “Het ek jou al ooit seergemaak?”

Bileam: “Nee.”

Donkie: “Nou hoekom slaan jy my dan?”

Bileam: “Omdat jy nie beweeg nie, jou dom dier.”

Donkie: “Maak oop jou oë en kyk hoekom nie!”

Toe sien Bileam die engel van die Here in die pad. 'n Gevolg van hierdie vreemde gebeurtenis was dat Bileam die moed gekry het wat hy nodig gehad het om vir Balak te sê wat God van hom wou hoor. Israel sou geseën wees; Moab sou vervloek wees.

Intussen het die Moabitiese vroue meer skade aan die Hebreeuse eensgesindheid gedoen as wat Balak se weermag ooit kon doen.

Terwyl Israel by Sittim gebly het, het die volk hulleself besoedel. Hulle het by Moabitiese vroue geslaap. Hierdie vroue het die volk uitgenooi om saam met hulle offers vir hulle gode te bring. Die volk het saam met hulle geëet en die gode van Moab aanbid. Hulle het begin om vir Baäl-Peor te aanbid. Die HERE was baie kwaad vir Israel.

Die HERE het vir Moses opdrag gegee: “Kry al die leiers van die volk bymekaar. Hang hulle in die helder dag by die tabernakel op sodat die HERE se woede kan bedaar.”

Moses het die stamhoofde van Israel aangesê om elke persoon wat Baäl-Peor begin aanbid het, dood te maak.

Terwyl Moses en die gemeenskap nog so by die ingang van die tabernakel gestaan en huil het, het 'n man uit Israel openlik daar aangekom met 'n vrou uit Midian. Toe die priester Pinehas, seun van

Eleasar, die seun van Aäron, dit sien, het hy tussen die mense opgespring en 'n spies gegryp. Hy het die man agternagesit na sy tent toe. Hy het die spies dwarsdeur die Israeliet en deur die vrou se maag gegooi. Dit het die plaag wat oor Israel gekom het, laat ophou. Daar het 24 000 mense aan die plaag gesterf.

Die HERE sê toe vir Moses: “Die priester Pinehas, seun van Eleasar, die seun van Aäron, het my woede van die Israeliete af weggevat toe hy my eer onder hulle beskerm het. Dit het verhoed dat Ek die Israeliete ter wille van my Naam voor die voet uitgewis het. Sê vir hom dat Ek 'n onvernietigbare vredesverbond met hom sluit. Volgens hierdie ooreenkoms sal hy en sy nageslag vir altyd my priesters wees. Omdat hy sy God se eer beskerm het, het hy versoening gebring vir die Israeliete.”

Soos die stryd om die Beloofde Land nadergekom het, het Moses 'n sensusopname gedoen en ontdek dat al die Israeliete wat 40 jaar gelede teen God se opdragte om Kanaän binne te gaan, gerebelleer het, dood is. Ná al hierdie jare was die volgende generasie uiteindelik gereed om die land binne te gaan. Maar Moses self moes die hartseer realiteit en sommige moeilike gevolge in die oë kyk.

Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Klim op die berg aan die oostekant. Kyk van daar af na die land wat Ek vir die Israeliete gaan gee. Nadat jy klaar daarna gekyk het, sal jy ook by jou vaders versamel word soos jou broer Aäron. In die Sinwoestyn het julle al twee my bevel verontagsaam. Toe die volk met julle baklei het, het julle nie by die waters van Meriba, by Kades in die Sinwoestyn, vir hulle gewys hoe heilig Ek is nie.”

Moses het vir die HERE gesê: “HERE, God wat asem gee aan alles wat leef, wys asseblief tog 'n nuwe persoon aan vir die gemeenskap. Laat dit iemand wees wat hulle kan lei sodat die gemeenskap van die HERE nie leierloos word soos skape wat nie 'n herder het nie.”

Die HERE het vir Moses geantwoord: “Vat Josua, die seun van Nun. God se Gees is in hom. Sit jou hande op hom. Laat hom voor Eleasar die priester en voor die hele gemeenskap gaan staan. Gee hom dan die opdrag om hulle te lei. Dra jou gesag aan hom oor sodat al die Israeliete na hom sal luister.”

Moses het gemaak soos die HERE vir hom gesê het. Hy het Josua laat kom en hom aan die priester en die volk voorgestel. Hy het sy hande op hom gesit en sy pligte aan hom oorgedra, soos die HERE vir Moses

gesê het.

Voordat Moses dood is en die mense deur die Jordaanrivier getrek het, moes hy baie administratiewe besonderhede afhandel. Hoe om die aanbidding te reël, hoe om gevangenes en die buit van hulle oorloë te hanteer, hoe om misdaad en wraak binne die Hebreeuse nasie te hanteer, hoe om nalatensregte op te stel – God het deur Moses ’n basiese regeringstelsel vir die lewe in die Beloofde Land opgestel. Moses se laaste taak ten opsigte van die angstige en opgewonde mense was om ’n wonderlike afskeidstoespraak te lewer: “Onthou wie julle is,” het hy vir hulle gesê, “en aan Wie julle behoort.”

Hierdie boek bevat Moses se woorde aan die hele volk Israel toe hulle in die woestyn oos van die Jordaanrivier was:

“Die HERE julle God het julle geseën in alles wat julle gedoen het. Hy het die wag gehou oor elke tree wat julle deur die groot woestyn gegee het. Gedurende die 40 jaar was die HERE julle God by julle en het Hy in elke behoefte van julle voorsien sodat julle niks kortgekom het nie.

“Ondersoek die hele geskiedenis vanaf die tyd toe God mense op aarde gemaak het tot nou toe. Ondersoek die hemel van die een uiteinde tot die ander. Kyk of iets so magtigs al ooit gebeur het. Het enige nasie soos julle al ooit die stem van God gehoor wat uit ’n vuur praat en dit oorleef? Het enige ander god al ooit ’n nasie vir homself geneem en hulle van ander nasies gered deur rampe, wondertekens, wonders, oorloë, indrukwekkende mag en groot daade wat mense bangmaak? Dit is wat die HERE julle God voor julle oë vir julle in Egipte gedoen het.

“Hy het julle hierdie dinge laat sien sodat julle kan besef dat die HERE God is en niemand anders nie. Hy het julle sy stem uit die hemel laat hoor sodat Hy julle kon leer. Op aarde het Hy julle sy groot vuur laat sien sodat Hy met julle uit die vuur kon praat. Omdat Hy julle voorouers liefgehad het, het Hy gekies om hulle nageslag te seën en om julle persoonlik met ’n vertoning van mag uit Egipte te bring. Hy het nasies wat veel groter as julle is, verdryf om julle die land in te bring en dit aan julle te gee as ’n spesiale besitting soos wat dit vandag is.

“Erken en onthou dit: Die HERE is God in hemel en op aarde en daar is geen ander god nie! As julle al die gebooie en voorskrifte

gehoorsaam wat ek vandag vir julle gee, sal dit met julle en met julle kinders goed gaan. Julle sal 'n lang lewe geniet in die land wat die HERE julle God vir altyd aan julle gee.

“Luister, Israel! Die HERE ons God is die enigste HERE. Jy moet die HERE jou God liefhê met jou hele hart, met jou hele siel en met al jou krag. Jy moet jouself heelhartig verbind aan die gebooie wat ek vandag vir jou gee. Skerp hierdie woorde by jou kinders in en praat met hulle daaroor by die huis en wanneer jy op pad is, wanneer jy gaan lê en wanneer jy opstaan.

“Gehoorzaam stiptelik al die gebooie wat ek jou vandag gee. Jy sal dan lewe en baie word. Jy sal die land binnegaan wat Ek met 'n eed aan jou voorouers beloof het en dit in besit neem. Onthou die hele pad waarlangs die HERE jou God jou 40 jaar lank deur die woestyn gelei het. Dit was om jou nederig te maak en jou te toets om te sien wat regtig in jou hart aangaan en of jy sy gebooie sal gehoorsaam. Hy het jou nederig gemaak deur jou te laat honger ly. Hy het jou toe manna laat eet, kos wat jy en jou voorouers nie vroeër geken het nie. Hy het dit gedoen om jou te leer dat mense meer as brood nodig het om van te leef. Ware lewe vir die mens kom van elke woord uit die mond van die HERE. Jou klere het 40 jaar lank gehou en jou voete het nie blase gekry of geswel nie. Jy moet diep in jou hart besef dat die HERE jou God jou dissiplineer net soos 'n ouer sy kind dissipline leer.

“Luister, Israel! Jy staan vandag op die punt om deur die Jordaanrivier te trek om die land af te vat van nasies wat baie groter en sterker as jy is. Hulle woon in groot stede met mure wat hemelhoog is. Hulle is sterk en groot – die afstammeling van die beroemde Enakitiese reuse. Jy ken die uitdrukking wat sê: ‘Wie kan staande bly teen die Enakiete?’ Maar jy moet weet die HERE jou God gaan voor jou uittrek soos 'n vuur wat alles verbrand. Hy sal hulle vernietig en aan jou onderwerp sodat jy hulle gou sal oorwin en uitdryf, net soos die HERE jou belowe het.

“Wanneer die HERE jou God dit vir jou gedoen het, moet jy nie sê: ‘Die HERE het hierdie land gegee omdat ons so regverdig is’ nie. Nee, dit is as gevolg van die goddeloosheid van die ander nasies dat Hy dit gedoen het. Dit is glad nie as gevolg van jou regverdigheid of opregtheid dat jy die land gaan inneem nie. Die HERE jou God sal hierdie nasies voor jou uitdryf omdat hulle so goddeloos is en om die eed na te kom wat Hy aan jou voorouers Abraham, Isak en Jakob

gesweer het. Ek sal dit weer sê: Die HERE jou God gee hierdie goeie land nie aan jou omdat jy so regverdig is nie, want jy is dit nie – jy is 'n hardkoppige volk.”

Moses het al die Israeliete bymekaargeroep en vir hulle gesê:

“Julle het met julle eie oë alles gesien wat die HERE in Egipte aan die farao, aan al sy onderdane en die hele land gedoen het, al die groot dade van krag, die wondertekens en die verstommende wonders. Maar tot vandag toe nog het die HERE julle nie die verstand gegee om dit te verstaan, ook nie oë om te sien of ore om te hoor nie! Vir 40 jaar lank het ek julle deur die woestyn gelei sonder dat julle klere of sandale ooit verweer het. Julle het nie brood of wyn of enige ander sterk drank gehad nie, maar Hy het vir julle kos gegee sodat julle kon ervaar dat die HERE julle God is.

“Hierdie gebod wat ek jou vandag gee, is nie te moeilik vir jou of buite jou bereik nie. Dit is nie daarbo in die hemel dat jy nodig het om te vra: ‘Wie sal hemel toe opgaan en dit afbring sodat ons dit kan hoor en daarvolgens lewe?’ nie. Dit is ook nie ver aan die ander kant van die see, dat jy moet vra: ‘Wie sal die see oorsteek om dit vir ons te bring sodat ons dit kan hoor en daarvolgens lewe?’ nie. Die boodskap is baie naby aan jou, dit is op jou lippe en in jou hart sodat jy daarvolgens kan lewe.

“Luister nou! Vandag gee ek vir julle 'n keuse tussen voorspoed en teëspoed, lewe en dood. Ek beveel jou vandag om die HERE jou God lief te hê en om sy opdragte, voorskrifte en reglemente na te kom deur in sy weë te wandel. As jy dit doen, sal jy lewe en 'n groot nasie word. Die HERE jou God sal jou en die land seën wat jy op die punt is om in besit te neem.

“Maar as jy jou hart wegdraai en jy weier om gehoorsaam te wees en as jy aangetrek word na ander gode toe om hulle te dien en te aanbid, dan waarsku ek jou nou dat jy verseker vernietig gaan word. Jy sal nie 'n lang en goeie lewe geniet in die land wat jy in besit gaan neem wanneer jy die Jordaan oorsteek nie.

“Vandag gee ek aan jou die keuse tussen lewe en dood, tussen seën en vloek. Ek roep die hemel en die aarde as getuies vir die keuse wat jy gaan maak. Mag jy tog die lewe kies sodat jy en jou nageslag mag lewe! Om die HERE jou God lief te hê, Hom te gehoorsaam, jou aan Hom te verbind, bring vir jou die lewe. Dan sal jy lank bly lewe in die land wat die HERE jou God gesweer het om aan jou voorouers

Abraham, Isak en Jakob te gee.”

Alhoewel Moses dikwels gekla het dat hy nie ’n openbare spreker was nie, het sy sterk woorde die mense aangemoedig om vir baie jare getrou, gefokus en hoopvol te wees. Moses het God goed geken, en hy het sy mense liefgehad. Daardie kennis en liefde het dikwels uitdrukking gevind in die poëtiese gebede vol hartseer, vreugde, passie en toewyding.

Toe het Moses vir Josua geroep. In die teenwoordigheid van die hele Israel het hy vir Josua gesê: “Wees sterk en hou moed! Jy sal hierdie volk die land inlei, die land wat die HERE aan hulle voorouers beloof het. Jy sal die land as hulle erfdeel aan hulle gee. Moenie bang of mismoedig wees nie, want die HERE is die Een wat voor jou uitgaan. Hy sal by jou wees. Hy sal jou nie in die steek laat nie en jou nie verlaat nie.”

Daardie selfde dag nog het die HERE vir Moses gesê: “Klim op Neboberg in die Abarimberge in Moab oorkant Jerigo. Kyk uit oor die land Kanaän, die land wat Ek aan die volk Israel gaan gee as hulle eie besitting. Jy sal daar op die berg sterf en by jou voorouers aansluit, net soos jou broer Aäron op Horberg gesterf en by sy voorouers aangesluit het. Beide van julle was ontrou aan My voor die oë van die Israeliete by die water van Meriba, by Kades in die Sinwoestyn. Julle het nagelaat om my heiligheid onder die Israeliete te handhaaf. Jy sal dan die land regoor jou van ’n afstand af sien, maar jy self mag nie die land binnegaan wat Ek aan die volk Israel gee nie.”

Moses het toe van die vlaktes van Moab teen Neboberg uitgeklim, na die punt van Pisgaberg toe, regoor Jerigo. Die HERE het hom die land van Gilead tot by Dan laat sien, die hele land van Naftali, die land van Efraim en Manasse en die hele land van Juda tot by die see in die weste; die Negevwostyn, die Jordaanvallei met Jerigo, die stad van palms, tot so ver as Soar. Die HERE het vir Moses gesê: “Dit is die land wat Ek met ’n eed aan Abraham, Isak en Jakob beloof het toe Ek vir hulle gesê het dat Ek dit aan hulle nageslag sou gee. Ek het jou toegelaat om dit te sien, maar jy mag nie die land binnegaan nie.”

Moses, die dienaar van die HERE, het toe daar in Moab gesterf, net soos die HERE gesê het. Die HERE het hom in ’n vlakte naby Bet-Peor begrawe, maar tot vandag toe nog weet niemand presies waar die plek is nie. Moses was 120 jaar oud toe hy dood is sonder dat sy oë

verswak geraak het of sy krag min geword het. Die volk Israel het in die vlakte van Moab vir 30 dae oor Moses gerou totdat die gebruikelike tyd van rou verby was.

Daar was nooit weer 'n profeet in Israel soos Moses nie. Hy het die HERE persoonlik geken. Die HERE het Moses gestuur om al die tekens en wonders in Egipte voor die farao, sy dienaars en die hele land te doen. Dit was deur Moses wat die HERE sy magtige en skrikwekkende dade voor die oë van die hele Israel gedoen het.

¹**Gorma:** “Gorma” beteken “met die banvloek vernietig”.

7

The Battle Begins

AFTER THE DEATH OF MOSES the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them — to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates — all the Hittite country — to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them.

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD

your God will be with you wherever you go.”



So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: “Go through the camp and tell the people, ‘Get your provisions ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own.’”

Then they answered Joshua, “Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey it, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!”

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. “Go, look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

The king of Jericho was told, “Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.” So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: “Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.”

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.” (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When

we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

"Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them — and that you will save us from death."

"Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."

So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. She said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. They said to Joshua, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us."

Two things separated the Israelites from their promise of a homeland. First, the Jordan River, a formidable barrier in an era before span bridges. Second, the rite of circumcision, the sign of God's covenant with his people. (None of this generation had been circumcised.)

Joshua organized the march to the land, with the ark of the covenant leading the way. When the priests carrying the sacred ark touched the river bank, the Jordan's brisk flow ceased. All the people crossed on dry ground. Once camped on the other side, the circumcisions were performed. For a few painful days, the only able-bodied people in the camp were females.

Then came the first battle—a test of faith and courage after 40 years of training.

Now the gates of Jericho were securely barred because of the Israelites. No one went out and no one came in.

Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have the whole army give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the army will go up, everyone straight in."

So Joshua son of Nun called the priests and said to them, "Take up the ark of the covenant of the LORD and have seven priests carry trumpets in front of it." And he ordered the army, "Advance! March around the city, with an armed guard going ahead of the ark of the LORD."

When Joshua had spoken to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven trumpets before the LORD went forward, blowing their trumpets, and the ark of the LORD's covenant followed them. The armed guard marched ahead of the priests who blew the trumpets, and the rear guard followed the ark. All this time the trumpets were sounding. But Joshua had commanded the army, "Do not give a war cry, do not raise your voices, do not say a word until the day I tell you to shout. Then shout!" So he had the ark of the LORD carried around the city, circling it once. Then the army returned to camp and spent the night there.

Joshua got up early the next morning and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. The seven priests carrying the seven trumpets went forward, marching before the ark of the LORD and blowing the trumpets. The armed men went ahead of them and the rear guard followed the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets kept sounding. So on the second day they marched around the city once and returned to the camp. They did this for six days.

On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the army,

“Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.”

When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city. They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it — men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the prostitute’s house and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her.” So the young men who had done the spying went in and brought out Rahab, her father and mother, her brothers and sisters and all who belonged to her. They brought out her entire family and put them in a place outside the camp of Israel.

Then they burned the whole city and everything in it, but they put the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron into the treasury of the LORD’s house. But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho — and she lives among the Israelites to this day.

At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath: “Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho.”

So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.

God had told Joshua and the Israelites that the spoil of war was his alone. And everyone obeyed — except for one man, Achan. As a result of Achan’s sin, God was not with the Israelite army when they attacked Ai. Joshua and the other leaders were humiliated and confused. When God revealed that the defeat was because Achan had sinned, the people repented, and Achan was killed for his actions.

Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you, and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land. You shall do to Ai and its king as you did to Jericho and

its king, except that you may carry off their plunder and livestock for yourselves. Set an ambush behind the city.”

Early the next morning Joshua mustered his army, and he and the leaders of Israel marched before them to Ai. The entire force that was with him marched up and approached the city and arrived in front of it. They set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and the city. Joshua had taken about five thousand men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the city. So the soldiers took up their positions — with the main camp to the north of the city and the ambush to the west of it. That night Joshua went into the valley.

When the king of Ai saw this, he and all the men of the city hurried out early in the morning to meet Israel in battle at a certain place overlooking the Arabah. But he did not know that an ambush had been set against him behind the city. Joshua and all Israel let themselves be driven back before them, and they fled toward the wilderness. All the men of Ai were called to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were lured away from the city. Not a man remained in Ai or Bethel who did not go after Israel. They left the city open and went in pursuit of Israel.

Then the LORD said to Joshua, “Hold out toward Ai the javelin that is in your hand, for into your hand I will deliver the city.” So Joshua held out toward the city the javelin that was in his hand. As soon as he did this, the men in the ambush rose quickly from their position and rushed forward. They entered the city and captured it and quickly set it on fire.

The men of Ai looked back and saw the smoke of the city rising up into the sky, but they had no chance to escape in any direction; the Israelites who had been fleeing toward the wilderness had turned back against their pursuers. For when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city and that smoke was going up from it, they turned around and attacked the men of Ai. Those in the ambush also came out of the city against them, so that they were caught in the middle, with Israelites on both sides. Israel cut them down, leaving them neither survivors nor fugitives.

Twelve thousand men and women fell that day — all the people of

Ai.

Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to the LORD, the God of Israel, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the Israelites.

Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses — just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the foreigners who lived among them.

God helped the Israelites to be victorious over the army of Ai. Yet Joshua made a mistake in not turning to God to guide him when some deceptive people from Gibeon arrived. They pretended to be from a far-off land, and they sought a treaty with the Israelites. Joshua made the treaty without consulting the wisdom of the Lord. Then he found out that the delegation was really from Gibeon, a neighboring tribe. He was constrained by his treaty, so he could not conquer the people and take their land. Word got out about Joshua's peace treaty, and other kings took up arms.

Now Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Ai and totally destroyed it, doing to Ai and its king as he had done to Jericho and its king, and that the people of Gibeon had made a treaty of peace with Israel and had become their allies. He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters. So Adoni-Zedek king of Jerusalem appealed to Hoham king of Hebron, Piram king of Jarmuth, Japhia king of Lachish and Debir king of Eglon. “Come up and help me attack Gibeon,” he said, “because it has made peace with Joshua and the Israelites.”

Then the five kings of the Amorites — the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon — joined forces. They moved up with all their troops and took up positions against Gibeon and attacked it.

The Gibeonites then sent word to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal: “Do not abandon your servants. Come up to us quickly and save us! Help us, because all the Amorite kings from the hill country have joined

forces against us.”

So Joshua marched up from Gilgal with his entire army, including all the best fighting men. The LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you.”

After an all-night march from Gilgal, Joshua took them by surprise. The LORD threw them into confusion before Israel, so Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely at Gibeon. Israel pursued them along the road going up to Beth Horon and cut them down all the way to Azekah and Makkedah. As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them, and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel:

“Sun, stand still over Gibeon,
and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.”

So the sun stood still,
and the moon stopped,
till the nation avenged itself on its enemies,

as it is written in the Book of Jashar.

The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a human being. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel!

Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

Now the five kings had fled and hidden in the cave at Makkedah. When Joshua was told that the five kings had been found hiding in the cave at Makkedah, he said, “Roll large rocks up to the mouth of the cave, and post some men there to guard it. But don’t stop; pursue your enemies! Attack them from the rear and don’t let them reach their cities, for the LORD your God has given them into your hand.”

So Joshua and the Israelites defeated them completely, but a few survivors managed to reach their fortified cities. The whole army then returned safely to Joshua in the camp at Makkedah, and no one uttered a word against the Israelites.

Joshua said, “Open the mouth of the cave and bring those five kings out to me.” So they brought the five kings out of the cave — the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon. When they had brought these kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had come with him, “Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings.” So they came forward and placed their feet on their necks.

Joshua said to them, “Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Be strong and courageous. This is what the LORD will do to all the enemies you are going to fight.” Then Joshua put the kings to death and exposed their bodies on five poles, and they were left hanging on the poles until evening.

At sunset Joshua gave the order and they took them down from the poles and threw them into the cave where they had been hiding. At the mouth of the cave they placed large rocks, which are there to this day.

That day Joshua took Makkedah. He put the city and its king to the sword and totally destroyed everyone in it. He left no survivors. And he did to the king of Makkedah as he had done to the king of Jericho.

So Joshua subdued the whole region, including the hill country, the Negev, the western foothills and the mountain slopes, together with all their kings. He left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had commanded. Joshua subdued them from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza and from the whole region of Goshen to Gibeon. All these kings and their lands Joshua conquered in one campaign, because the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for Israel.

Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

When Jabin king of Hazor heard of this, he sent word to Jobab king of Madon, to the kings of Shimron and Akshaph, and to the northern kings who were in the mountains, in the Arabah south of Kinnereth, in

the western foothills and in Naphtali Dor on the west; to the Canaanites in the east and west; to the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites and Jebusites in the hill country; and to the Hivites below Hermon in the region of Mizpah. They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots — a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. All these kings joined forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom to fight against Israel.

The LORD said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid of them, because by this time tomorrow I will hand all of them, slain, over to Israel. You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots.”

So Joshua and his whole army came against them suddenly at the Waters of Merom and attacked them, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Israel. They defeated them and pursued them all the way to Greater Sidon, to Misrephoth Maim, and to the Valley of Mizpah on the east, until no survivors were left. Joshua did to them as the LORD had directed: He hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots.

At that time Joshua turned back and captured Hazor and put its king to the sword. (Hazor had been the head of all these kingdoms.) Everyone in it they put to the sword. They totally destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed, and he burned Hazor itself.

Joshua took all these royal cities and their kings and put them to the sword. He totally destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded. Yet Israel did not burn any of the cities built on their mounds — except Hazor, which Joshua burned. The Israelites carried off for themselves all the plunder and livestock of these cities, but all the people they put to the sword until they completely destroyed them, not sparing anyone that breathed. As the LORD commanded his servant Moses, so Moses commanded Joshua, and Joshua did it; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses.

So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.

These ancient cities defeated by Joshua and the Israelites have been forgotten by history. Yet, for the Israelites, each name listed

represented risk, loss, hardship and struggle. God's promise to Abraham centuries earlier was coming to pass. A new nation was being formed. Much of the promised land was theirs; much still remained to be taken. In the meantime, their leader had some final words of encouragement and challenge.

After a long time had passed and the LORD had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, summoned all Israel — their elders, leaders, judges and officials — and said to them: “I am very old. You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain — the nations I conquered — between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. The LORD your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.

“Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as all the good things the LORD your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the LORD your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.” If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD’S anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God.

Joshua said to all the people, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I

assigned the hill country of Seir to Esau, but Jacob and his family went down to Egypt.

“Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I afflicted the Egyptians by what I did there, and I brought you out. When I brought your people out of Egypt, you came to the sea, and the Egyptians pursued them with chariots and horsemen as far as the Red Sea. But they cried to the LORD for help, and he put darkness between you and the Egyptians; he brought the sea over them and covered them. You saw with your own eyes what I did to the Egyptians. Then you lived in the wilderness for a long time.

“I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived east of the Jordan. They fought against you, but I gave them into your hands. I destroyed them from before you, and you took possession of their land. When Balak son of Zippor, the king of Moab, prepared to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam son of Beor to put a curse on you. But I would not listen to Balaam, so he blessed you again and again, and I delivered you out of his hand.

“Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you — also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow. So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.’

“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him.”

On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at

Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the LORD.

“See!” he said to all the people. “This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”

Then Joshua dismissed the people, each to their own inheritance.

After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel.

Die stryd begin

Moses, die dienaar van die HERE, is dood. Daarna het die HERE met Josua, seun van Nun, gepraat. Hy was vroeër die assistent van Moses. Die HERE het vir hom gesê: “Noudat my dienaar Moses dood is, moet jy gereedmaak om my volk deur die Jordaanrivier te lei na die land toe wat Ek vir die Israeliete gee. Soos Ek vir Moses belowe het, sal Ek elke plek waar julle kom vir julle gee. Alles sal julle grond wees, van die Negevwuostyn af tot by die Libanonberge, die hele gebied van die Hetiete, van die Eufraatrivier af tot by die Middellandse See in die weste. Niemand sal teen jou bestand wees solank jy leef nie. Soos Ek by Moses was, so sal Ek ook saam met jou wees. Ek sal jou nooit in die steek laat nie. Ek sal jou nooit los nie.

“Wees sterk en dapper. Jy is die een wat hierdie volk moet lei om die land in besit te neem. Ek het dit met ’n eed aan hulle voorouers beloof.

“Wees sterk en baie dapper! Voer al die opdragte uit wat Ek vir my dienaar Moses gegee het. Moenie links of regs daarvan afwyk nie. Jy sal dan suksesvol wees in alles wat jy doen. Hou hierdie wetboek altyd by jou. Dink dag en nag daaroor na sodat jy alles kan doen wat daarin geskryf is. Jy sal dan sukses behaal op jou pad. Jy sal voorspoedig wees. My opdrag aan jou is dat jy sterk en dapper moet wees. Moenie bang of huiwerig wees nie. Die HERE jou God is saam met jou oral waar jy gaan.”



Josua het die leiers van die volk beveel: “Gaan deur die kamp en sê vir die mense om padkos reg te kry. Oor drie dae gaan julle deur die Jordaan trek om die land wat die HERE julle God vir julle gee, in ontvangs te neem.”

Hulle het vir Josua geantwoord: “Ons sal alles doen wat jy vir ons

sê. Ons sal gaan waarheen jy ons ook al stuur. Soos ons na Moses geluister het, sal ons ook aan jou gehoorsaam wees. Mag die HERE jou God saam met jou wees soos Hy by Moses was. Enige persoon wat jou opdragte verontagsaam en nie luister na alles wat jy beveel nie, sal tereggestel word. Jy moet sterk en dapper wees.”

Josua, die seun van Nun, het in die geheim twee verkenners van Sittim af uitgestuur. Hy het vir hulle gesê: “Gaan verken die land, veral Jerigo.” Hulle is daar weg en het by die huis van ’n prostituut uitgekom. Haar naam was Ragab. Hulle het daar tuisgegaan.

Iemand het vir die koning van Jerigo gaan vertel dat daar gedurende die nag Israelitiese mans aangekom het om die land te verken. Hy het toe vir Ragab laat weet: “Laat die mans uitkom wat na jou huis toe gekom het. Hulle het op die land kom spioeneer.”

Ragab het die twee mans laat wegkruip. Sy het vir die koning laat weet: “Daar was mans hier by my. Ek weet nie van waar af hulle gekom het nie. Toe die poorte teen skemer gesluit het, is die mans hier weg. Ek weet nie waarheen hulle gegaan het nie. As jy gou maak, kan jy hulle miskien nog inhaal.” Sy het die mans op die dak laat klim en hulle weggesteek onder die vlashalms wat sy daar oopgegooi het. Die koning se soldate het toe na die mans gaan soek langs die pad wat na die driwwe by die Jordaan loop. Net na die agtervolgers weg is, is die stad se poorte gesluit.

Voor die mans gaan slaap het, het die vrou na hulle toe opgeklim op die dak. Sy het vir hulle gesê: “Ek weet dat die HERE vir julle die land gaan gee. Ons is lam van die skrik. Almal van ons wat in die land woon, is bang vir julle. Ons het gehoor hoe die HERE die water van die Rietsee voor julle laat wegdroog het toe julle uit Egipte getrek het. Ook wat julle met Sihon en Og, die twee konings van die Amoriëte, aan die oorkant van die Jordaan gedoen het en hoe julle hulle uitgewis het. Ons het dit alles gehoor. Ons harte het ineengekrimp. Niemand van ons het meer moed oor om teen julle te veg nie. Die HERE julle God is God in die hemel daarbo en op die aarde hieronder. Ek was goed vir julle.

“Sweer dan nou vir my voor die HERE dat julle ook goed sal wees vir my familie. Gee vir my die versekering dat julle my pa en my ma, my broers en susters en hulle families se lewens sal spaar wanneer julle Jerigo aanval.”

Die mans sê toe vir haar: “Ons lewens is julle versekering. As julle nie ons saak weggee nie, sal ons ons belofte hou wanneer die HERE die land vir ons gee.”

Sy het op die muur gewoon. Haar huis was daar gebou. Sy het hulle met 'n tou deur die venster laat afsak. Haar raad vir hulle was: “Vlug na die berge toe sodat julle agtervolgers julle nie in die hande kan kry nie. Kruip drie dae lank daar weg totdat die agtervolging verby is. Julle kan daarna weer julle koers kry.”

Die mans is die berge in. Hulle het drie dae lank daar gebly tot die mense wat hulle agtervolg het, teruggekom het. Die mense wat hulle agternagesit het, het orals langs die pad na hulle gesoek, maar kon hulle nêrens kry nie. Die mans het toe afgekom uit die berge en is deur die Jordaan terug na Josua, die seun van Nun. Hulle het aan hom terugrapporteer oor alles wat hulle daar aangetref het. Hulle het vir Josua gesê: “Die HERE sal die hele land in ons mag gee. Almal wat in die land bly, is lam van vrees vir ons.”

Twee dinge het die Israeliete weggehou van hulle Beloofde Land. Eerstens die Jordaanrivier, 'n ontsaglike hindernis in 'n era voor hangbrûe. Tweedens, die ritueel van besnydenis, die teken van God se verbond met sy mense. (Niemand van hierdie generasie is besny nie.)

Josua het die tog na die land georganiseer met die verbondsark heel voor. Toe die priesters wat die heilige ark gedra het aan die water raak, het die Jordaan vinnig ophou vloei. Al die mense het op droë grond deurgeloop. Toe hulle aan die ander kant kamp opgeslaan het, is die mans besny. Vir 'n paar pynlike dae kon net die vroue in die kamp iets doen.

Toe breek die eerste geveg aan – 'n toets van geloof en moed ná 40 jaar se oefening.

Jerigo se poorte was dig gesluit omdat hulle bang was vir die Israeliete. Niemand het dit gewaag om in of uit te gaan nie.

Die HERE het vir Josua gesê: “Ek gee jou beheer oor Jerigo, sy koning en sy soldate. Al die soldate moet een keer rondom die stad marsjeer. Doen dit vir die volgende ses dae. Sewe priesters wat elkeen 'n ramshoring dra, moet voor die ark loop. Op die sewende dag moet julle sewe keer om die stad marsjeer. Die priesters moet dan hard op die ramshorings blaas. Sodra julle hoor dat die priesters 'n uitgerekte sein op die ramshorings gee, moet almal 'n harde kreet gee. Die stad se muur sal dan inmekaarstort. Die manskappe kan dan daar oorklim om in die stad in te gaan.”

Josua, die seun van Nun, het toe die priesters bymekaargeroep. Hy het vir hulle gesê: “Tel die ark van die verbond op. Laat sewe priesters

elkeen met 'n ramshoring voor die ark van die HERE uitloop.” Vir die volk het hy gesê: “Trek rondom die stad. Die afdeling soldate moet voor die ark van die HERE uit marsjeer.”

Toe Josua klaar met die volk gepraat het, het die sewe priesters met die ramshorings voor die ark van die HERE begin loop. Hulle het op die ramshorings geblaas. Die ark van die verbond van die HERE het agter hulle aangekom. Terwyl die priesters heeltyd op die ramshorings geblaas het, het die soldate voor hulle uitmarsjeer. Die res van die volk het agter die ark gevolg. Josua het die volk gewaarsku: “Moenie skreeu nie. Moenie 'n geluid maak nie. Daar moenie 'n woord uit julle mond kom voor die dag dat ek vir julle sê: ‘Skreeu!’ nie. Dan moet julle hard begin skreeu.” Hy het die ark van die HERE toe een maal om die stad laat gaan. Daarna is hulle terug na hulle kamp toe en het die nag in die kamp gebly.

Josua was die volgende môre vroeg op. Die priesters het weer die ark van die HERE gedra. Die sewe priesters met die ramshorings het voor die ark van die HERE geloop en op die ramshorings geblaas. Die soldate het voor hulle uitmarsjeer. Die volk het agter die ark van die HERE aangekom. Die priesters het die hele tyd op die ramshorings geblaas. Op die tweede dag het hulle weer een keer om die stad geloop en teruggegaan na hulle kamp toe. So het hulle ses dae lank gemaak.

Op die sewende dag het hulle vroeg opgestaan toe dit nog skemer was. Hulle het oudergewoonte om die stad gegaan, maar op hierdie dag sewe keer. Die sewende keer het die priesters die teken op die ramshorings gegee. Josua het vir die volk geskreeu: “Gee die kreet! Die HERE gee die stad vir julle! Die stad is 'n banoffer vir die HERE. Die stad en alles wat daarin is, moet heeltemal uitgewis word. Die prostituut Ragab en almal wat by haar in die huis is, moet bly lewe. Sy het die verkenners wat ons uitgestuur het, weggesteek.”

Toe die volk hoor dat die ramshorings die teken gee, het hulle die aanvalskreet uitgeskreeu. Die mure het inmekaargestort. Almal het oorgeklouter, reguit die stad in. Hulle het die stad ingeneem. Hulle het alles in die stad met die swaard uitgewis: mans en vroue, oud en jonk, selfs die beeste, die skape en die donkies.

Josua het vir die twee mans wat die land kom verken het, gesê: “Gaan na die prostituut se huis toe en bring die vrou met almal wat by haar is daar uit, soos julle haar beloof het.” Die twee verkenners het gegaan en vir Ragab, haar pa en ma, haar broers en hulle gesinne en haar familie uitbring. Die mans het hulle na 'n veilige plek buite die

kamp van Israel gebring.

Hulle het die stad met alles wat daarin was, verbrand. Die goed wat van silwer en goud gemaak was en die brons- en ystergoed het hulle egter in die skatkis van die HERE se heiligdom gaan sit. So het Josua die prostituut Ragab en haar familie wat saam met haar in die huis was, laat bly leef. Sy het haar tussen die Israëliete gevestig tot vandag toe. Sy het die mans wat Josua gestuur het om Jerigo te gaan verken, weggesteek.

In daardie tyd het Josua 'n eed afgelê: “Die HERE vervloek die man wat die stad Jerigo probeer herbou. As hy weer sy fondament probeer lê, sal dit hom sy oudste seun kos. As hy die deure van die poorte weer probeer insit, gaan hy sy jongste seun verloor.”

Die HERE was met Josua. Josua het deur die hele land beroemd geword.

God het vir Josua en die Israëliete gesê dat die oorlogsbuit aan Hom alleen behoort. En almal het dit gehoorsaam – behalwe een man, Akan. As gevolg van Akan se sonde, was God nie by die Israëlitiese weermag toe hulle Ai aangeval het nie. Josua en die ander leiers was verneder en verward. Toe God dit bekendmaak dat die nederlaag as gevolg van Akan se sonde was, het die mense berou getoon, en Akan is doodgemaak.

Die HERE het toe vir Josua gesê: “Moenie bang wees nie. Moenie moedeloos word nie. Vat al jou manskappe en gaan veg teen Ai. Ek gee die koning van Ai, sy volk en sy stad en sy land in jou mag. Maak met Ai en sy koning net soos jy met Jerigo en sy koning gemaak het. Hierdie keer mag julle egter die buit en die vee vir julleself vat. Stel 'n hinderlaag aan die agterkant van die stad op.”

Josua het die môre vroeg opgestaan en sy manskappe opgeroep. Hy en die aanvoerders van Israel het die manskappe teen Ai gelei. Al die manskappe het saam met hom opgetrek en nader aan die stad beweeg. Hulle het kamp opgeslaan aan die noordekant van Ai. Daar was 'n laagte tussen hulle en Ai. Josua het ongeveer 5 000 man gevat en hulle in 'n hinderlaag opgestel tussen Bet-El en Ai aan die westekant van die stad. Die hoofkamp was dus noord van die stad en die manskappe in die hinderlaag aan die westekant van die stad. Josua self het daardie nag in die laagte geslaap.

Toe die koning van Ai hulle sien, het hy en sy leer haastig klaargemaak en vroeg die môre uitgetrek om teen Israel oorlog te

maak. Hy en sy mense is na 'n plek reg oor die Jordaanvallei. Hy het egter nie geweet van die hinderlaag wat agter die stad gelê het nie. Josua en die hele Israel het omgevlug en op die vlug geslaan in die rigting van die woestyn. Almal in die stad is opgeroep om hulle te agtervolg. Hulle is agter Josua aan en is so van die stad af weggelok. Daar was nie 'n man in Ai of Bet-El oor wat nie agter die Israeliete aan was nie. Hulle het egter die stad net so oop gelos toe hulle agter Israel aan is.

Toe sê die HERE vir Josua: “Steek die spies in jou hand na Ai toe uit. Ek gee die stad in jou mag oor.” Josua het die spies in sy hand na Ai toe uitgesteek. Toe hy sy hand uitsteek, was dit die teken. Die manskappe wat weggekruip het, het vinnig uit hulle skuilplekke opgespring en die stad bestorm. Hulle het die stad ingestorm en dit verower. Hulle het dit dadelik aan die brand gestee.

Toe die mans van Ai omkyk, sien hulle hoe die rook uit die stad in die lug optrek. Hulle kon absoluut nêrens heen vlug nie. Die mense wat in die rigting van die woestyn gevlug het, het nou teen hulle agtervolgers omgedraai. Josua en al die Israeliete het gesien dat die hinderlaag gewerk het. Toe die rook uit die stad begin opstyg, het hulle omgedraai en die mans van Ai aangeval. Die manskappe van Israel het uit die stad gekom en hulle van agter aangeval. Die mense van Ai het nou Israeliete voor en agter hulle gehad. Die Israeliete het hulle neergevel tot daar nie een oor was wat kon oorleef of vrykom nie.

Die mense van Ai wat daardie dag dood is, sowel mans as vroue, was 12 000.

Josua het daarna 'n altaar op die Ebalberg vir die HERE, die God van Israel, gebou. Hy het dit gebou soos Moses, die dienaar van die HERE, dit vir die Israeliete voorgeskryf het.

Josua het toe vir hulle alles wat die wet sê oor seën en straf voorgelees, soos in die boek van die wet geskryf staan. Josua het voor almal van Israel wat daar bymekaar was, vroue en kinders en vreemdelinge wat saam met hulle gebly het, alles gelees wat Moses beveel het. Hy het niks uitgelaat nie.

God het die Israeliete gehelp om die oorwinning oor Ai se weermag te behaal. Tog het Josua 'n fout gemaak deur nie om God se leiding te vra toe bedrieglike mense uit Gibeon daar aangekom het. Hulle het

voorgegee dat hulle van 'n ver land afkom en graag 'n verdrag met die Israeliete wil sluit. Josua het die verdrag gesluit sonder om die Here om wysheid te nader. Toe ontdek hy dat die afvaardiging eintlik van Gibeon af kom, 'n naburige stam. Die verdrag het sy hande gebind; daarom kon hy die mense nie oorwin en hulle land afneem nie. Josua se vredesverdrag het bekend geword en ander konings het hulle wapens opgeneem.

Adoni-Sedek was die koning van Jerusalem. Hy het gehoor dat Josua Ai ingeneem en dit heeltemal verwoes het, net soos hy met Jerigo gemaak het. Hy het gehoor dat hy ook so gemaak het met sowel Ai se koning as dié van Jerigo. Hy het ook gehoor van die verdrag wat die Gibeoniete met Israel gesluit het en dat hulle nou tussen hulle woon. Hy en sy mense het baie bang geword. Gibeon was 'n sterk stad. Dit was groter as Ai en so sterk soos 'n stad met 'n koning. Sy soldate was dapper vegters. Koning Adoni-Sedek van Jerusalem het toe na verskillende konings boodskappe gestuur: Hoham van Hebron, Piram van Jarmut, Jafia van Lakis en Debir van Eglon. Hy het hulle laat weet: “Kom en help my dat ons Gibeon kan gaan aanval. Hulle het 'n verdrag gesluit met Josua en die Israeliete.”

Die vyf Amoritiese konings, dié van Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmut, Lakis en Eglon, het toe hulle magte gekombineer. Hulle het gaan kamp opslaan by Gibeon om teen hom oorlog te maak.

Die Gibeoniete het vir Josua in die kamp by Gilgal laat weet: “Moenie nou u dienaars in die steek laat nie. Kom tog vinnig hiernatoe om ons te red. Kom help ons. Al die Amoritiese konings wat in die heuwelgebied bly, het teen ons saamgespan.”

Josua en al sy bekwame soldate het uit Gilgal opgeruk. “Jy hoef nie vir hulle bang te wees nie,” het die HERE vir Josua gesê. “Ek gee hulle in jou mag oor. Nie een van hulle sal teen jou kan standhou nie.”

Nadat Josua die hele nag deur van Gilgal af getrek het, het hy 'n verrassingsaanval op die Amoriete geloods. Die HERE het hulle paniekbevange vir die Israeliete gemaak. Israel het hulle by Gibeon verpletterend verslaan. Hulle het die vyand teen die hoogte by Bet-Goron uitgedryf en hulle doodgemaak tot by Aseka en by Makkeda. Terwyl die Amoriete nog aan die vlug was teen die hoogte uit na Bet-Goron toe, het die HERE hulle al die pad van daar af tot by Aseka met groot haelstene uit die lug neergevel. Daar is baie meer dood van die hael as wat die Israeliete met die swaard doodgemaak het.

Op die dag dat die HERE vir Israel oorwinning gegee het oor die Amoriete, het Josua die HERE om hulp gevra. Voor almal het hy by die

“Laat die son tog stilstaan bo Gibeon.
Laat die maan stilstaan oor die Ajalonlaagte!”
Die son het gaan stilstaan.
Die maan het net daar bly hang
totdat Israel sy vyande uitgewis het.

Dit is soos dit opgeteken staan in *Die boek van die Opregte*.

Die son het halfpad in die lug vasgesteek. Hy was nie haastig om op sy gewone tyd onder te gaan nie. So ’n dag was daar nog nooit voorheen en nooit daarna nie. Die HERE het geluister na wat ’n mens vir Hom vra! Die HERE het aan Israel se kant geveg.

Josua en almal saam met hom is toe terug na die kamp in Gilgal.

Die vyf konings het op die vlug geslaan. Hulle het in ’n grot in Makkeda gaan wegkruip. Josua het berig gekry dat hulle ontdek is waar hulle in die grot van Makkeda wegkruip. Hy het opdrag gegee: “Rol groot klippe voor die bek van die grot. Sit wagte daar om dit op te pas. Julle ander moenie daar bly nie. Agtervolg die vyand. Vel hulle neer. Moenie toelaat dat hulle by hulle stede uitkom nie. Die HERE julle God gee hulle oor aan julle.”

Josua en die Israëliete het hulle heeltemal uitgewis. ’n Klein klompie van hulle het oorleef en na die versterkte stede ontvlug. Toe hulle klaar was, is al die Israëliete veilig terug na Josua by die kamp in Makkeda. Niemand het iets verder oor die Israëliete te sê gehad nie.

Josua het toe opdrag gegee: “Maak die grot se bek oop. Bring die vyf konings uit die grot uit na my toe.” Hulle het so gemaak. Hulle het die vyf konings uit die grot na Josua toe gebring. Dit was die konings van Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmut, Lakis en Eglon. Nadat hulle die konings na Josua toe gebring het, het hy al die Israëliete bymekaargeroep. Hy sê toe vir die offisiere wat saam met hom gegaan het: “Kom hier, kom sit julle voete op die konings se nekke.” Hulle het dit toe gedoen.

Hy het voortgegaan: “Julle moenie bang wees nie. Moenie ontstel wees nie. Julle moet sterk en dapper wees. Dit is soos die HERE gaan maak met al julle vyande teen wie julle moet oorlog maak.” Josua het daarna die vyf konings doodgemaak. Hy het elkeen aan ’n boom laat ophang. Hulle het aan daardie vyf bome bly hang tot skemeraand toe.

Terwyl die son ondergaan, het Josua beveel om hulle liggame van die bome af te haal. Hulle het dit in die grot gaan gooi waar die konings weggekruip het. Hulle het weer klippe voor die bek van die

grot gerol. Dit is vandag nog daar.

Daardie selfde dag nog het Josua ook Makkeda ingeneem. Hy het die koning en elkeen wat in die stad bly, heeltemal uitgewis. Daar het nie 'n mens daarin oorgebly nie. Hy het met Makkeda se koning net so gemaak soos met die koning van Jerigo.

So het Josua die hele gebied ingeneem: die heuwelgebied, die Negevwoestyn, die kusvlakte en die hange tussenin met al hulle konings. Niemand het vrygekom nie. Hy het alles wat leef met die banvloek uitgewis, net soos die HERE, die God van Israel, beveel het. Josua het hulle vernietig van Kades-Barnea af tot by Gasa, en die hele gebied van Gosen af tot by Gibeon. Hy het al hierdie gebiede en hulle konings in een enkele veldtog oorwin. Die HERE, die God van Israel, het saam met Israel geveg.

Josua en al die Israeliete saam met hom is daarna terug na die kamp in Gilgal.

Jabin van Hasor het van Josua se veldslae gehoor. Hy het boodskappe na Jobab, koning van Madon, gestuur en ook na die konings van Simron en Aksaf. Sy boodskappe het ook uitgegaan na die konings in die noordelike heuwelgebied, dié in die Jordaanvallei suid van die See van Galilea, in die kusvlakte en in die heuwels van Dor by die Middellandse See, die Kanaäniete – oos en wes – die Amoriete, Hetiete, Feresiete, Jebusiete in die heuwelgebied en die Hewiete aan die hange van die Hermonberg in die Miske gebied. Almal het met hulle leërs en perde en strydwaens saamgetrek vir oorlog teen Israel. Hulle was so baie soos die sandkorrels op die strand. Al hierdie konings het 'n bondgenootskap gesluit. Hulle het almal by die Meromwaters bymekaargekom en reggemaak om teen Israel te gaan veg.

Die HERE het toe vir Josua gesê: “Jy moenie vir hulle bang wees nie. Mêre hierdie tyd sal Ek hulle aan Israel oorgee en dan sal hulle almal dood wees. Jy moet hulle perde se hakskeenseninge afsny en hulle strydwaens verbrand.”

Josua en sy hele mag het na die Meromwaters opgeruk en hulle in 'n verrassingsaanval oorval. Die HERE het vir Israel die oorwinning gegee. Hulle het die vyand agtervolg tot by Groot-Sidon, Misrefot-Majim en tot in die Mispelaagte in die ooste. Die Israeliete het hulle uitgeroei totdat daar nie een oor was nie. Josua het gemaak soos die HERE gesê het en hulle perde se hakskeenseninge afgesny en hulle strydwaens verbrand.

Josua het toe omgedraai en Hasor ingeneem. Hy het sy koning met

die swaard doodgemaak. Hasor was destyds die hoofstad van al die omringende koninkryke. Hulle het elke lewende wese in die stad doodgemaak en niemand gespaar nie. Josua het die stad afgebrand.

Hy het ook al die omringende dorpe ingeneem en hulle konings en inwoners uitgewis. Dit was soos Moses, die dienaar van die HERE, beveel het. Israel het egter nie die plekke wat op ruïneheuwels gebou was, afgebrand nie. Josua het net Hasor afgebrand. Alles wat hulle in hierdie stede kon buit en die vee het Israel vir hulleself gehou. Hulle het die mense uitgeroei tot daar nie een oor was nie. Alles wat die HERE sy dienaar Moses beveel het, en wat Moses weer vir Josua opgedra het, het Josua gedoen. Hy het nêrens van enigiets wat die HERE Moses beveel het, afgewyk nie.

Josua het die hele land ingeneem, soos die HERE vir Moses beveel het. Josua het toe die land soos dit tussen die stamme verdeel is, aan Israel as hulle erfgrond gegee. Die land kon toe tot rus kom van die oorlog.

Hierdie antieke stede wat deur Josua en die Israeliete oorwin is, is deur die geskiedenis vergeet. Tog het elkeen van hierdie name wat gelys is vir die Israeliete risiko, verlies, swaarkry en stryd verteenwoordig. God se belofte aan Abraham eeue gelede is nou vervul. 'n Nuwe nasie word gevorm. Groot dele van die Beloofde Land was nou hulle s'n; maar daar moes nog baie dele ingeneem word. Intussen het hulle leier 'n klompie laaste woorde gehad om hulle te bemoedig en uit te daag.

Daar het 'n lang tyd verbygegaan sedert die HERE vir Israel vrede met al sy bure gegee het. Josua het intussen baie oud geword. Josua het die hele Israel bymekaargeroep, met al hulle leiers, hulle hoofde, hulle regters en hulle ampsdraers. Hy het vir hulle gesê: “Ek het baie oud geword. Julle het gesien wat die HERE julle God alles ter wille van julle met hierdie nasies gedoen het. Hy het aan julle kant geveg. Ek het die gebiede van al die nasies wat nog oorgebly het onder julle verdeel, sowel hulle wat nog oorwin moet word as dié van al die nasies wat ek alreeds uitgeroei het. Dit is almal van die Jordaan af tot by die Middellandse See in die weste waar die son ondergaan. Die HERE julle God sal dié wat oor is, voor julle uit verjaag. Hy sal hulle verdryf sodat julle ook hulle grond kan oorneem. Dit is wat die HERE julle God julle belof het.

“Ek sal binnekort sterf. Julle moet egter in julle diepste binnekant oortuig wees dat al die wonderlike dinge wat die HERE julle God vir julle beloof het, alles reeds plaasgevind het. Daar is nie een van hulle nog uitstaande nie. Net so seker soos die HERE julle God elke goeie ding wat Hy vir julle beloof het, laat gebeur het, net so seker sal Hy al die teëspoed oor julle bring wat Hy beloof het as julle aan Hom ongehoorsaam is. Hy sal julle uitroei uit hierdie mooi land wat Hy vir julle gegee het. As julle die verbond verbreek wat die HERE julle God met julle gemaak het en julle loop agter ander gode aan om hulle te dien en hulle te aanbid, sal die HERE se woede teen julle losbreek en julle sal in ’n oogwink verdwyn uit hierdie mooi land wat Hy vir julle gegee het.”

Josua het al die stamme van Israel by Sigem laat bymekaarkom. Hy het al die leiers van Israel, hulle hoofde, hulle regters en hulle ampsdraers opgeroep om voor God te verskyn.

Josua sê toe vir die hele volk: “So sê die HERE, die God van Israel: Julle voorouers, Tera, die pa van Abraham, en Nahor, het lank terug anderkant die Eufraatrivier gewoon. Hulle het afgode gedien. Ek het julle vader Abraham van anderkant die Eufraat laat kom en hom deur die hele land Kanaän laat rondtrek. Ek het vir hom ’n groot nageslag gegee. Ek het vir hom Isak gegee. Vir Isak het Ek Jakob en Esau gegee. Vir Esau het Ek die berge in Seir gegee as sy eiendom. Jakob en sy seuns het afgetrek na Egipte toe.

“Ek het Moses en Aäron na julle toe gestuur. Ek het Egipte met groot rampe getref. Daarna het Ek julle daar laat uittrek. Ek het julle voorouers uit Egipte bevry. Toe hulle by die Rietsee aankom, het Egipte hulle agternagesit met oorlogwaens en perde. Julle vaders het na die HERE geroep om hulle te help. Ek het dit donker laat word tussen julle en die Egiptenaars. Ek het die see oor die Egiptenaars laat spoel en hulle het daarin verdwyn. Julle het met julle eie oë gesien wat Ek met die Egiptenaars gedoen het. Daarna het julle baie lank in die woestyn vertoef.

“Ek het julle toe in die land van die Amoriete laat kom wat oos van die Jordaan gewoon het. Hulle het teen julle oorlog gemaak. Ek het julle egter die oorwinning oor hulle gegee. Julle het hulle land ingeneem. Ek het hulle uitgewis om vir julle plek te maak. Toe het Balak, die seun van Sippor en koning van Moab, begin oorlog maak teen Israel. Hy het Bileam, die seun van Beor, laat kom om julle te vervloek. Ek wou nie na Bileam luister nie. Ek het gesorg dat hy julle eerder seën. Ek het julle uit Balak se mag gered.

“Julle het toe deur die Jordaan getrek en by Jerigo uitgekom. Die mense van Jerigo het teen julle geveg. Ook die Amoriete, Feresiete, Kanaäniete, Hetiete, Girgasiëte, Hewiete en Jebusiëte het teen julle oorlog gemaak. Ek het egter almal van hulle in julle mag oorgegee. Ek het die twee Amoritiese konings voor julle uit verdryf. Julle het hulle nie met julle swaarde en julle boë oorwin nie. Ek het julle ’n land gegee waarvan julle nie die grond bewerk het nie, en ook nie sy stede gebou het nie. Julle bly nou daarin en julle leef van wingerde en olyfboorde wat julle nie self geplant het nie.

“Eer nou die HERE en aanbid Hom met volle oorgawe en met getrouheid. Laat vaar die gode wat julle voorouers anderkant die Eufraat en in Egipte aanbid het. Dien die HERE. As julle nie die HERE wil aanbid nie, moet julle vandag vir julleself besluit wie julle dan wil aanbid. Is dit die gode wat julle voorouers anderkant die Eufraat gedien het, of is dit die gode van die Amoriete in wie se land julle nou woon? Ek en my huisgesin sal die HERE aanbid.”

Die volk sê toe vir Josua: “Ons sal net die HERE ons God aanbid. Ons sal net na Hom luister.”

Josua het daardie dag in Sigem die volk ’n verbond laat sluit. Hy het vir hulle die voorskrifte en die bepalings daarvan uitgespel. Hy het dit alles in die wetboek van God neergeskryf. Hy het ’n groot klip gekry en dit daar onder die groot eikeboom wat naby die heiligdom van die HERE was, regop laat staan.

Hy het vir die hele volk gesê: “Sien julle hierdie klip? Dit is ’n getuie teen ons. Hy het alles gehoor wat die HERE vir ons gesê het. Dit sal ’n getuie teen julle wees as julle nie julle woord teenoor God hou nie.”

Josua het toe die volk laat teruggaan na hulle grond toe.

Kort na hierdie gebeure is Josua, die seun van Nun en dienaar van die HERE, dood. Hy was toe 110 jaar oud. Hulle het hom op sy grond begrawe by Timnat-Serag in die heuwels van Efraim, net noord van Gaäsberg.

Israel het die HERE bly aanbid solank Josua geleef het en ook in die tyd van die leiers wat langer as Josua bly leef het. Hulle het alles ervaar wat die HERE vir Israel gedoen het.

A Few Good Men ... and Women

THE PEOPLE SERVED THE LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel.

Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred and ten. And they buried him in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.¹ They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused the LORD's anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. In his anger against Israel the LORD gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight, the hand of the LORD was against them to defeat them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress.



Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. They quickly turned from the ways of their ancestors, who had been obedient to the LORD's commands. Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods

and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and said, “Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did.”

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, who saved them. The Spirit of the LORD² came on him, so that he became Israel’s judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

Eventually the people of Israel turned away from God again, and the cycle of social chaos began anew. The Moabite leader, Eglon, forged a coalition and for 18 years oppressed Israel. The people cried out to God, who faithfully gave them another judge/leader, Ehud, to deliver them. Ehud tricked Eglon into a private meeting and killed the king with his sword in a surprise attack. The king was so overweight that the sword handle was covered by his fat girth. With Eglon dead, Moab fell easily to Ehud’s raiders. Then the Israelites had peace for 80 years.

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, now that Ehud was dead. So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.

Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between

Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’”

Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.”

“Certainly I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses’ brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh.

When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron.

Then Deborah said to Barak, “Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?” So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. At Barak’s advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera’s troops fell by the sword; not a man was left. Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite.

Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. Don’t be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him

with a blanket.

“I’m thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

“Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’”

But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. “Come,” she said, “I will show you the man you’re looking for.” So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple — dead.

On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

Following this victory, the land experienced 40 years of peace. After that, another strong leader was needed, but at this point in Israel’s history, the roster seemed empty. A splintered, tribal coalition could not sustain its national identity. The people, forgetting their special relationship to God, began to adapt to the surrounding cultures, eventually joining their unconquered neighbors in pagan worship. As a result, God no longer aided the Israelite army, which began losing battles. Once again the people discovered the tragic cycle of the consequences of their disobedience.

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it. Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD

for help.

When the Israelites cried out to the LORD because of Midian, he sent them a prophet, who said, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I brought you up out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians. And I delivered you from the hand of all your oppressors; I drove them out before you and gave you their land. I said to you, ‘I am the LORD your God; do not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live.’ But you have not listened to me.”

In their hunger and weakness, the Israelites appealed to God, who informed them that their big problem was not agricultural or military, but spiritual. To illustrate, God picked for service a farmer from the weakest clan in his tribe. Like most new leaders, Gideon was uncertain if he could measure up. But God was looking for a faithful follower, not a decorated soldier.

The angel of the LORD came and sat down under the oak in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezerite, where his son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress to keep it from the Midianites. When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.”

“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our ancestors told us about when they said, ‘Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?’ But now the LORD has abandoned us and given us into the hand of Midian.”

The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?”

“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.”

The LORD answered, “I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.”

Gideon replied, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you.”

And the LORD said, “I will wait until you return.”

Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made bread without yeast. Putting the meat in a basket and its broth in a pot, he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened bread, place them on this rock, and pour out the broth.” And Gideon did so. Then the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared. When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, “Alas, Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!”

But the LORD said to him, “Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.”

So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD Is Peace. To this day it stands in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

Now all the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples joined forces and crossed over the Jordan and camped in the Valley of Jezreel. Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him. He sent messengers throughout Manasseh, calling them to arms, and also into Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so that they too went up to meet them.

Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised — look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.” And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew — a bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.” That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me, ‘My own strength has saved me.’ Now announce to the army, ‘Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.’” So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained.

But the LORD said to Gideon, “There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will thin them out for you there. If I say, ‘This one shall go with you,’ he shall go; but if I say, ‘This one shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”

So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, “Separate those who lap the water with their tongues as a dog laps from those who kneel down to drink.” Three hundred of them drank from cupped hands, lapping like dogs. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.

The LORD said to Gideon, “With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands. Let all the others go home.” So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites home but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others.

Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley. During that night the LORD said to Gideon, “Get up, go down against the camp, because I am going to give it into your hands. If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp.” So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp. The Midianites, the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples had settled in the valley, thick as locusts. Their camels could no more be counted than the sand on the seashore.

Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. “I had a dream,” he was saying. “A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed.”

His friend responded, “This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands.”

When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, “Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands.” Dividing the three hundred men into three companies, he placed trumpets and empty jars in the hands of all of them, with torches inside.

“Watch me,” he told them. “Follow my lead. When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly as I do. When I and all who are with me blow our trumpets, then from all around the camp blow yours and shout, ‘For the LORD and for Gideon.’”

Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!” While each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled.

When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. Israelites from Naphtali, Asher and all Manasseh were called out, and they pursued the Midianites. Gideon sent messengers throughout the hill country of Ephraim, saying, “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters of the Jordan ahead of them as far as Beth Barah.”

So all the men of Ephraim were called out and they seized the waters of the Jordan as far as Beth Barah. They also captured two of the Midianite leaders, Oreb and Zeeb. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They pursued the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon, who was by the Jordan.

Thus Midian was subdued before the Israelites and did not raise its head again. During Gideon's lifetime, the land had peace forty years.

No sooner had Gideon died than the Israelites again prostituted themselves to the Baals. They set up Baal-Berith as their god and did not remember the LORD their God, who had rescued them from the hands of all their enemies on every side.

Once again the Israelites forgot their faithful, holy God — and once again they suffered the consequences of their unbelief. Several Israelite leaders tried to keep enemies at bay, with mixed results. No one had Gideon's daring or success. But God was still working, and he sent an angel to make an extraordinary announcement.

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was childless, unable to give birth. The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are barren and childless, but you are going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean. You will become pregnant and have a son whose head is never to be touched by a razor because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from the womb. He will take the lead in delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines."

The birth happened just as the angel had said, and the parents raised the child as God had directed. Young Samson, wild and unusually strong, became a man with a secret.

The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife."

His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?"

But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me. She’s the right one for me.” (His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.)

Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.

Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion’s carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some honey. He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion’s carcass.

Now his father went down to see the woman. And there Samson held a feast, as was customary for young men. When the people saw him, they chose thirty men to be his companions.

“Let me tell you a riddle,” Samson said to them. “If you can give me the answer within the seven days of the feast, I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes. If you can’t tell me the answer, you must give me thirty linen garments and thirty sets of clothes.”

“Tell us your riddle,” they said. “Let’s hear it.”

He replied,

“Out of the eater, something to eat;
out of the strong, something sweet.”

For three days they could not give the answer.

On the fourth day, they said to Samson’s wife, “Coax your husband into explaining the riddle for us, or we will burn you and your father’s household to death. Did you invite us here to steal our property?”

Then Samson's wife threw herself on him, sobbing, "You hate me! You don't really love me. You've given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer."

"I haven't even explained it to my father or mother," he replied, "so why should I explain it to you?" She cried the whole seven days of the feast. So on the seventh day he finally told her, because she continued to press him. She in turn explained the riddle to her people.

Before sunset on the seventh day the men of the town said to him,

"What is sweeter than honey?
What is stronger than a lion?"

Samson said to them,

"If you had not plowed with my heifer,
you would not have solved my riddle."

Then the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him. He went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of everything and gave their clothes to those who had explained the riddle. Burning with anger, he returned to his father's home. And Samson's wife was given to one of his companions who had attended him at the feast.

Later on, at the time of wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat and went to visit his wife. He said, "I'm going to my wife's room." But her father would not let him go in.

"I was so sure you hated her," he said, "that I gave her to your companion. Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead."

Samson said to them, "This time I have a right to get even with the Philistines; I will really harm them." So he went out and caught three hundred foxes and tied them tail to tail in pairs. He then fastened a torch to every pair of tails, lit the torches and let the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. He burned up the shocks and standing grain, together with the vineyards and olive groves.

When the Philistines asked, "Who did this?" they were told,

“Samson, the Timnite’s son-in-law, because his wife was given to his companion.”

So the Philistines went up and burned her and her father to death. Samson said to them, “Since you’ve acted like this, I swear that I won’t stop until I get my revenge on you.” He attacked them viciously and slaughtered many of them. Then he went down and stayed in a cave in the rock of Etam.

The Philistines went up and camped in Judah, spreading out near Lehi. The people of Judah asked, “Why have you come to fight us?”

“We have come to take Samson prisoner,” they answered, “to do to him as he did to us.”

Then three thousand men from Judah went down to the cave in the rock of Etam and said to Samson, “Don’t you realize that the Philistines are rulers over us? What have you done to us?”

He answered, “I merely did to them what they did to me.”

They said to him, “We’ve come to tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines.”

Samson said, “Swear to me that you won’t kill me yourselves.”

“Agreed,” they answered. “We will only tie you up and hand you over to them. We will not kill you.” So they bound him with two new ropes and led him up from the rock. As he approached Lehi, the Philistines came toward him shouting. The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him. The ropes on his arms became like charred flax, and the bindings dropped from his hands. Finding a fresh jawbone of a donkey, he grabbed it and struck down a thousand men.

Then Samson said,

“With a donkey’s jawbone
I have made donkeys of them.

With a donkey’s jawbone
I have killed a thousand men.”

When he finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and the place was called Ramath Lehi.

Because he was very thirsty, he cried out to the LORD, "You have given your servant this great victory. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?" Then God opened up the hollow place in Lehi, and water came out of it. When Samson drank, his strength returned and he revived. So the spring was called En Hakkore, and it is still there in Lehi.

Samson led Israel for twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her. The people of Gaza were told, "Samson is here!" So they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the city gate. They made no move during the night, saying, "At dawn we'll kill him."

But Samson lay there only until the middle of the night. Then he got up and took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. The rulers of the Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver."

So Delilah said to Samson, "Tell me the secret of your great strength and how you can be tied up and subdued."

Samson answered her, "If anyone ties me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, I'll become as weak as any other man."

Then the rulers of the Philistines brought her seven fresh bowstrings that had not been dried, and she tied him with them. With men hidden in the room, she called to him, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" But he snapped the bowstrings as easily as a piece of string snaps when it comes close to a flame. So the secret of his

strength was not discovered.

Then Delilah said to Samson, “You have made a fool of me; you lied to me. Come now, tell me how you can be tied.”

He said, “If anyone ties me securely with new ropes that have never been used, I’ll become as weak as any other man.”

So Delilah took new ropes and tied him with them. Then, with men hidden in the room, she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” But he snapped the ropes off his arms as if they were threads.

Delilah then said to Samson, “All this time you have been making a fool of me and lying to me. Tell me how you can be tied.”

He replied, “If you weave the seven braids of my head into the fabric on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I’ll become as weak as any other man.” So while he was sleeping, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, wove them into the fabric and tightened it with the pin.

Again she called to him, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!” He awoke from his sleep and pulled up the pin and the loom, with the fabric.

Then she said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.” With such nagging she prodded him day after day until he was sick to death of it.

So he told her everything. “No razor has ever been used on my head,” he said, “because I have been a Nazirite dedicated to God from my mother’s womb. If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man.”

When Delilah saw that he had told her everything, she sent word to the rulers of the Philistines, “Come back once more; he has told me everything.” So the rulers of the Philistines returned with the silver in their hands. After putting him to sleep on her lap, she called for someone to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him.

Then she called, “Samson, the Philistines are upon you!”

He awoke from his sleep and thought, “I’ll go out as before and shake myself free.” But he did not know that the LORD had left him.

Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding grain in the prison. But the hair on his head began to grow again after it had been shaved.

Now the rulers of the Philistines assembled to offer a great sacrifice to Dagon their god and to celebrate, saying, “Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands.”

When the people saw him, they praised their god, saying,

“Our god has delivered our enemy
into our hands,

the one who laid waste our land
and multiplied our slain.”

While they were in high spirits, they shouted, “Bring out Samson to entertain us.” So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them.

When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, “Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them.” Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the LORD, “Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.” Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, “Let me die with the Philistines!” Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.

Then his brothers and his father’s whole family went down to get

him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel twenty years.

After Samson, the Israelites continued their pattern of spiritual compromise during this sad period of their history. Enter Ruth, a young Moabite woman, into God's story. If the Hebrew people thought God was their exclusive property, this foreign woman challenged that myth. Ruth was loyal, determined, lovely and clever. She became part of the lineage of King David. More important, she was God's choice to illustrate the worldwide reach of God's special gift of hope and life — his plan of salvation as broad and deep as his divine love.

1Baal(s), Ashtoreth, Asherah: False gods of ancient pagan cultures.

2The Spirit of the LORD: In the Old Testament, this term referred to the intangible presence of God and all of his attributes. The phrase is used to show how God empowered certain individuals to carry out specific callings.

'n Klompie goeie mans ... en vroue

Terwyl Josua nog geleef het, het die volk die HERE bly dien. Terwyl dié leiers oor was wat langer as Josua geleef het, het hulle nog die HERE gedien. Hierdie mense het nog al die groot dade beleef wat die HERE vir Israel gedoen het.

Josua, die seun van Nun en dienaar van die HERE, is dood op 110 jaar. Hy is op sy grond begrawe in Timnat-Geres, in die heuwels van Efraim, noord van Gaäsberg.

Daardie geslag het uitgesterf. Ná hulle het daar 'n geslag mense gekom wat nie die HERE geken het nie. Hulle het ook niks geweet van die groot dinge wat Hy gedoen het nie. Die Israeliete het toe iets gedoen wat vir die HERE baie sleg was. Hulle het die Baäls begin aanbid. Hulle het hulle rug gedraai op die HERE, die God van hulle voorouers, wat hulle uit Egipte gered het. Hulle het agter die vreemde gode van die volke rondom hulle aangegaan. Die Israeliete het voor hierdie gode begin kniel. Dit het die HERE kwaad gemaak. Hulle het die HERE net so gelos en die Baäls en die Astartes begin aanbid. Die HERE was woedend vir Israel. Hy het hulle uitgelewer aan rowers wat Israel geplunder het. Die HERE het hulle in die hand van al hulle vyande rondom hulle oorgelewer. Die Israeliete kon geen teenstand bied teen hulle vyande nie. Elke keer wanneer hulle uitgegaan het om te gaan veg, was die hand van die HERE teen hulle. Dit is soos Hy hulle voorheen gewaarsku het en vir hulle belowe het. Die Israeliete was uiters moedeloos.

Die HERE het egter leiers na vore laat kom om die volk te red van die mense wat hulle beroof het. Maar die volk was nie gehoorsaam aan hulle leiers nie. Hulle het agter ander gode aangegaan en hulle aanbid. Hulle het gou afgewyk van die koers wat hulle voorouers ingeslaan het, naamlik om die HERE se gebooie te volg. Hulle het nie dieselfde koers gevolg nie. Wanneer die HERE vir hulle 'n leier gegee het, was Hy saam met daardie leier en het Hy die volk gered van hulle vyande so lank as wat die leier geleef het. Die HERE was jammer vir sy volk wanneer hulle gekla het oor die mense wat hulle laat swaarkry en

hulle onderdruk het. Sodra die leier egter sterf, het hulle maar weer teruggeval op die ou weë en het hulle net nog erger te kere gegaan as die mense voor hulle. Hulle het agter vreemde gode aangeloop om hulle te aanbid en voor hulle te buig. Hulle het nie van hulle verkeerde dade afgesien of hulle eiewilligheid gelos nie.

Die HERE het dan weer woedend geword en vir Homself gesê: “Hierdie volk verbreek die verbond wat Ek met hulle voorouers gemaak het. Hulle luister nie na My nie. Daarom gaan Ek nie langer die nasies wat oorgebly het ná Josua se dood uitdryf nie. Ek gaan Israel met hierdie nasies toets om te kyk of hulle agter die HERE aangaan soos hulle voorouers, of nie.”



Wat die Israeliete gedoen het, was verkeerd vir die HERE. Hulle het die HERE hulle God uit hulle gedagtes geskuif en eerder die beelde van die Baäls en die gewyde pale van Asjera aanbid. Die HERE was woedend vir die Israeliete. Hy het hulle aan koning Kusan-Risatajim van Aram-Naharajim uitgelewer. Hulle was agt jaar lank sy onderdane. Die Israeliete het die HERE begin smeek om hulle te help. Hy het toe vir hulle iemand gestuur om hulle te bevry. Sy naam was Otniël, die seun van Kaleb se jonger broer Kenas. Die Gees van die HERE was in hom. Hy het Israel begin lei. Otniël het oorlog teen die Aramese koning Kusan-Risatajim gaan maak. Die HERE het Otniël die oorhand laat kry en hy het Kusan-Risatajim verslaan. Daar was toe 40 jaar lank vrede in die land. Otniël, die seun van Kenas, is later dood.

Uiteindelik het die mense van Israel weer weggedraai van God, en die siklus van sosiale chaos het van voor af begin. Die Moabitiese leier, Eglon, het 'n koalisie gevorm en Israel vir agtien jaar onderdruk. Die mense het na die Here uitgeroep, wat getrou vir hulle nog 'n rigter/leier, Ehud, gegee het om hulle te verlos. Ehud het Eglon gekul om 'n private ontmoeting te hê en die koning in 'n verrassingsaanval met sy swaard vermoor. Die koning was so vet dat die swaard se handvatsel deur sy vet maag bedek is. Met Eglon se dood het Moab maklik onder Ehud se stropers geval. Die Israeliete het vir 80 jaar vrede gehad.

Ná Ehud se dood het die Israeliete weer begin doen wat verkeerd is vir die HERE. Die HERE het hulle uitgelewer aan die mag van Jabin. Hy

was die Kanaänitiese koning in Hasor. Die aanvoerder van sy leër was Sisera van Garoset-Gojim. Hy het 900 ysterstrydwaens onder sy bevel gehad. Hy het die Israeliete twintig jaar lank swaar onderdruk. Maar Israel het by die HERE gepleit om hulle hiervan te bevry.

Debora was 'n vroulike profeet. Sy was die vrou van Lappidot. Sy was op daardie stadium die leier van die Israeliete. Sy het onder die Deboraapalm in die heuwels van Efraim, tussen Rama en Bet-El, gewoon. Die Israeliete het vir regsake na haar toe gekom. Sy het Barak, die seun van Abinoam uit Kedes in Naftali laat roep en vir hom gesê: “Die HERE, die God van Israel, het 'n opdrag vir jou: ‘Trek met 10 000 man uit Naftali en Sebulon saam op na Taborberg toe. Ek sal vir Sisera, die aanvoerder van Jabin se leër, met sy oorlogswaens en sy weermag laat optrek na die Kisonspruit toe. Ek sal hulle in jou mag oorgee.’”

Barak antwoord haar: “Ek sal net gaan as jy saam met my gaan.”

“Goed,” het sy vir hom gesê. “Ek sal wel saam met jou gaan, maar omdat dit jou voorwaarde is, sal jy geen eer vir die veldtog kry nie. Die HERE sal Sisera deur 'n vrou oorwin.” Debora het klaargemaak en sy is saam met Barak na Kedes toe. Barak het Sebulon en Naftali by Kedes bymekaargebring vir die oorlog. Barak het 10 000 manskappe gelei. Debora was saam met hulle.

Geber was 'n Keniet uit die nageslag van Moses se skoonpa Gobab. Geber het weggetrek van die Keniete af. Hy het sy tente by die eikeboom van Saänannim naby Kedes opgeslaan.

Sisera het berig gekry dat Barak, die seun van Abinoam, op Taborberg saamgetrek het. Sisera het toe sy 900 strydwaens en al sy manskappe bymekaargekry en van Garoset-Gojim af na Kisonspruit toe begin marsjeer.

Debora beveel toe vir Barak: “Maak jou reg. Die HERE gaan vandag Sisera aan jou uitlewer. Die HERE sal voor jou uitmarsjeer.” Barak het toe sy 10 000 man van Tabor af gelei om te gaan veg. Die HERE het Sisera en sy oorlogswaens en al sy manskappe holderstebolder voor Barak laat vlug. Sisera het van sy wa af gespring en te voet verder gevlug.

Barak het die oorlogswaens en hulle bemanning agtervolg tot by Garoset-Gojim. Al Sisera se soldate is doodgemaak. Nie een van hulle het die geveg oorleef nie. Sisera het te voet gevlug na die tent van Jael, die vrou van Geber die Keniet. Daar was 'n goeie vriendskapsverhouding tussen koning Jabin van Hasor en die familie van Geber die Keniet.

Jael het uitgekom om Sisera te ontvang. Sy het vir hom gesê: “Kom hiernatoe, Meneer! Kom na my toe. Moenie bang wees nie!” Hy gaan toe in haar tent in. Sy het hom onder ’n deken weggesteek.

“Gee tog vir my ’n bietjie water om te drink,” het hy vir haar gevra. “Ek is dors.” Sy het hom toe melk uit die melksak laat drink. Sy het hom weer onder die deken toegemaak.

Hy sê toe vir haar: “Staan by die ingang van die tent. As hier iemand kom wat vir jou vra: ‘Is hier dalk ’n man by jou?’ moet jy vir hom sê: ‘Neel!’”

Sisera was moeg en het aan die slaap geraak. Geber se vrou Jael het toe een van die tentpenne gevat en met ’n hamer in haar hand stilletjies na Sisera gesluip. Sy het die tentpen dwarsdeur sy slaap gedryf tot in die grond sodat hy gesterf het.

Barak was op soek na Sisera. Jael het uitgekom na hom toe. Sy sê toe vir hom: “Kom hier, ek sal jou wys waar is die man na wie jy soek.” Barak het agter haar aangegaan. Hy kry toe vir Sisera wat dood daar lê met ’n tentpen deur sy slaap.

God het op daardie dag vir koning Jabin van Kanaän voor die Israeliete verneder. Die Israeliete het al sterker en sterker teen Jabin geword en hom uiteindelik vernietig.

Ná hierdie oorwinning het die land vir 40 jaar in vrede geleeft. Daarna was nog ’n sterk leier nodig, maar op hierdie stadium van Israel se geskiedenis was daar niemand nie. ’n Versplinterde stamkoalisie kon nie die nasionale identiteit onderhou nie. Die mense, wat van hulle spesiale verhouding met God vergeet het, het by hulle omgewing begin aanpas en het uiteindelik by hulle onoorwonne bure aangesluit en afgode begin aanbid. Met die gevolg dat God nie meer die Israelitiese weermag gehelp het nie en hulle gevegte begin verloor het. Weereens het die mense die tragiese siklus van die gevolge van hulle ongehoorsaamheid ontdek.

Die Israeliete het weer begin doen wat verkeerd is in die oë van die HERE. Hy het hulle sewe jaar lank aan die Midianiete onderwerp. Die Midianiete het die Israeliete so hard behandel dat hulle die berge in gevlug het. Daar het hulle vir hulle skuilplekke in grotte en ontoeganklike plekke teen die Midianiete gebou. Sodra hulle iets geplant het, het die Midianiete, Amalekiete en die ander mense uit die ooste op hulle toegesak en hulle aangeval. Hulle het daar kamp opslaan en alles wat in die grond was, vernietig, selfs so ver as tot by Gasa. Hulle het nie ’n ding agtergelaat waarvan Israel kon lewe nie,

selfs nie eers 'n skaap of 'n bees of 'n donkie nie. Die hordes Midianiete het met hulle veetroppe gekom en soos 'n swerm sprinkane hulle tente oral opgeslaan. Hulle kamele kon nie eers getel word nie. Waar hulle ook al gekom het, het hulle die land kaal gestroop. As gevolg van die Midianiete was die Israeliete totaal teen die grond. Die Israeliete het toe by die HERE om hulp begin smeek.

Toe die Israeliete vanweë die Midianiete so by die HERE begin soebat om hulle te help, het Hy 'n profeet na hulle gestuur. Hy het vir hulle gesê: “Dit is wat die HERE, die God van Israel, vir julle sê: ‘Ek het julle uit Egipte laat trek. Ek het julle bevry van die slawerny in Egipte. Ek het julle gered uit die hand van Egipte en hulle wat julle onderdruk het. Ek het hulle voor julle uit verdryf en Ek het hulle land vir julle gegee. Ek het vir julle gesê: Ek is die HERE julle God. Julle mag nie die gode dien van die Amoriete in wie se land julle woon nie. Maar julle wou nie na My luister nie.’”

In hulle honger en swakheid het die Israeliete by God om hulp aangeklop wat hulle daarop gewys het dat hulle groot probleem geestelik van aard is. Om dit te demonstreer, het God 'n boer uit die swakste familie in sy stam gekies. Soos die meeste nuwe leiers was Gideon onseker of hy aan die eise sou kon voldoen. Maar God was op soek na 'n getroue navolger, nie 'n soldaat met baie medaljes nie.

Die Engel van die HERE het onder die eikeboom in Ofra kom sit. Dit het aan Joas van die Abiëserfamilie behoort. Sy seun Gideon was besig om onder op die vloer van 'n parskuip koring uit te slaan. Hy het daar vir die Midianiete weggekruip. Die Engel van die HERE het toe aan hom verskyn. Hy het vir hom gesê: “Die HERE is by jou, dapper man!”

“Meneer,” het Gideon vir hom gesê, “as die HERE wel by ons is, waarom gebeur al hierdie dinge met ons? Waar is al die wonderlike dinge wat Hy gedoen het waarvan ons voorouers ons vertel het? Hulle het vertel: ‘Die HERE het ons uit Egipte bevry.’ Maar nou het die HERE sy rug op ons gedraai. Hy het ons uitgelewer aan die mag van die Midianiete.”

Die HERE het toe na Gideon toe gedraai en vir hom gesê: “Gaan met hierdie krag wat jy het en gaan bevry die Israeliete uit die mag van die Midianiete! Ek stuur jou.”

Maar Gideon sê vir Hom: “Verskoon my, Meneer, maar hoe kan ek Israel red? My familie is een van die swakstes in Manasse. Ek is die onbelangrikste lid in my pa se familie.”

“Ek is dan saam met jou!” het die HERE vir hom gesê. “Jy sal al die

Midianiete verslaan asof jy net teen een man veg.”

Gideon het vir Hom gesê: “As ek U nog net een ding kan vra: Gee tog vir my ’n teken waardeur ek seker kan wees dat dit U is, HERE, wat met my praat! Moet asseblief nie van hier af weggaan voordat ek na U teruggekom het om my offer hier voor U te kom neersit nie.”

Die HERE sê toe: “Ek sal hier vir jou wag tot jy terug is.”

Gideon is terug huis toe. Hy het ’n bokkie gaargemaak en uit sestien kilogram meel ’n ongesuurde brood gebak. Hy het die vleis in ’n mandjie gepak en die sous in ’n pot gegooi. Hy het daarmee teruggekom na die Engel onder die eikeboom en dit daar neergesit.

God se Engel sê toe vir Gideon: “Vat die vleis en die brood en sit dit op hierdie rots neer. Gooi die sous daaroor uit.” Gideon het so gemaak. Die Engel van die HERE het toe met die punt van die stok in sy hand aan die vleis en die brood geraak. Vuur het uit die rots opgevlam en die vleis en die brood weggebrand. Die Engel van die HERE het toe verdwyn. Toe Gideon agterkom dat dit die Engel van die HERE was, het hy hardop uitgeroep: “Ag tog, oppermagtige HERE, ek het dan die Engel van die HERE in die oë gekyk!”

“Dit is alles in orde,” het die HERE vir Gideon gesê. “Moenie bang wees nie! Jy sal nie sterf nie!”

Gideon het net daar ’n altaar vir die HERE gebou. Hy het dit genoem “Die HERE is Vrede”. Die altaar is nog al die tyd daar in Ofra van die Abiësriete.

Kort daarna het al die magte van Midian, Amalek en die ander mense uit die ooste ’n alliansie teen Israel gevorm. Hulle het deur die Jordaanrivier getrek en gaan kamp opslaan in die Jisreëlvlakte. Die Gees van die HERE het oor Gideon gekom. Hy het op die ramshoring die oproep vir oorlog geblaas en die Abiësriete opgeroep om hom te volg. Hy het boodskappers na Manasse, Aser, Sebulon en Naftali toe gestuur. Hy het hulle ook opgeroep om hom te volg. Hulle het almal by hom aangesluit.

Gideon het vir God gesê: “As dit regtig so is soos U gesê het dat U die Israeliete deur my gaan bevry, wys dit tog vir my. Ek sal vannag ’n stuk wol op die dorsvloer los. As daar dou op die wol kom, maar die grond rondom bly droog, sal ek weet dat U my wil gebruik om die Israeliete te bevry.” Dit het so gebeur. Gideon het die volgende môre vroeg opgestaan. Hy het die wol uitgedruk en ’n hele bak vol water daaruit gewring.

Toe sê hy vir God: “Moenie ongeduldig met my word nie. Kan ek nog net een keer vra. Laat die wol hierdie keer droog wees, terwyl die

grond rondom vol dou is.” God het dit daardie nag net so laat gebeur. Die wol was droog, maar die grond rondom was vol dou.

Jerubbaäl, dit is nou Gideon, en al sy manskappe by hom is vroeg die oggend op, en het gaan kamp opslaan by En-Garod. Die Midianiete se kamp was op die vlakte naby die Moré-koppie, noord van hulle. Toe sê die HERE vir Gideon: “Jy het te veel soldate by jou. As Ek die Midianiete met soveel manskappe aan jou oorgee, sal die Israëliete teenoor My beweer dat hulle hulleself met hulle eie mag bevry het. Sê vir die manskappe elkeen wat bang is om te gaan veg, mag van die Gileadberg af wegdraai en teruggaan huis toe.” Toe het 22 000 man teruggegaan. Daar het 10 000 oorgebly.

Toe sê die HERE vir Gideon: “Hulle is nog steeds te veel. Vat hulle af na die water toe. Ek sal daar vir jou uitsoek watter saam met jou moet gaan en watter nie.”

Gideon is toe met die manskappe af na die water toe. Daar het die HERE vir hom gesê: “Sit dié wat die water uit hulle hand soos ’n hond met hulle tonge opslurp, eenkant. Skei hulle van dié wat op hulle knieë gaan om die water te drink.” Daar was 300 wat die water met hulle hand geskep het om te drink. Al die ander het afgebuk om te drink.

Toe sê die HERE vir Gideon: “Ek sal julle met hierdie 300 man wat die water uit hulle hand gedrink het, bevry. Ek sal Midian aan jou onderwerp. Al die ander manskappe kan teruggaan na hulle huise toe.” Gideon het hulle proviand en die ramshorings wat hulle by hulle gehad het, gevat en hulle teruggestuur. Hy het net die 300 by hom oorgehou.

Die Midianitiese kamp was onder op die vlakte. Daardie nag het die HERE vir Gideon gesê: “Staan op en gaan af na die Midianiete se laer toe. Ek gee hulle oor aan jou. As jy bang is om hulle te gaan aanval, moet jy en jou helper Pura eers na hulle kamp toe gaan. Luister wat hulle vir mekaar sê. Jy sal dan baie moed kry.” Gideon en sy helper Pura is toe af na die kant van die Midianiete se kamp. Die Midianiete, die Amalekiete en die ander mense uit die ooste wat op die vlakte toegesak het, was so baie soos sprinkane. Hulle kamele kon nie getel word nie. Hulle was so baie soos sandkorrels op die strand.

Gideon het toe nadergesluip. In die kamp was ’n man juis besig om vir sy makker te vertel wat hy gedroom het. “Ek het gedroom,” het hy vertel, “daar kom ’n ronde garsbrood na die kamp van Midian aangerol. Die brood het ’n tent getref, dit omgestamp en dit inmekaar laat tuimel.”

Sy maat het geantwoord: “Dis niks anders as die swaard van die Israeliet Gideon, die seun van Joas, nie. God gee Midian en almal in sy kamp in sy mag oor.”

Toe Gideon van die droom hoor en wat dit beteken, het hy die HERE gedank. Hy het teruggegaan na die Israeliete se kamp. Hy het sy manskappe opgeroep: “Staan op! Die HERE gee die Midianiete oor aan julle.” Gideon het die 300 manskappe in drie afdelings verdeel. Hy het vir elke manskap ’n ramshoring in die hand gegee en ook ’n leë erdepot met ’n fakkel daarin.

Toe sê hy vir sy manskappe: “Kyk mooi wat ek doen. Wanneer ek by die kamp kom, moet julle presies maak soos ek. Wanneer ek en almal by my op die ramshorings blaas, moet julle aan die ander kant van die kamp ook op julle ramshorings begin blaas. Skreeu dan: ‘Vir die HERE en vir Gideon!’”

Gideon en die 100 manskappe by hom het tot op die kant van die kamp gegaan. Dit was net na middernag. Die wagte vir die middelste nagweg het toe pas omgeruil. Hulle het toe op die ramshorings geblaas en die erdepotte stukkend geslaan. Al drie afdelings het op hulle ramshorings geblaas en die erdepotte gebreek. Hulle het die fakkels in hulle linkerhand gehou en die ramshorings in hulle regterhand. Hulle het begin skreeu: “’n Swaard vir die HERE en vir Gideon!” Elkeen was op sy pos reg rondom die kamp. Hulle het gesien hoe die hele kamp vervaard rondskarrel en paniekerig skreeu.

Toe die 300 Israeliete op hulle ramshorings blaas, het die HERE veroorsaak dat die mense in die kamp mekaar aanval. Hulle het uit die kamp gevlug tot so ver as Bet-Sitta na Sereda se kant toe en tot by die grens van Abel-Megola naby Tabbat. Gideon het elke man uit Naftali, Aser en die hele Manasse opgeroep. Hulle het die Midianiete agtervolg. Gideon het boodskappers uitgestuur na die heuwels van Efraim toe om te sê: “Kom af en val Midian aan. Sny hulle af by die driwwe van die Jordaan en by Bet-Bara.”

Hy het al die manskappe van Efraim opgeroep. Hulle het die driwwe by die Jordaan en Bet-Barabeset. Hulle het Oreb en Seëb, die aanvoerders van die Midianiete, gevang. Die Israeliete het Oreb by die Orebrots en Seëb in die Seëbparskuip doodgemaak. Hulle het die Midianiete verder agtervolg. Ná die tyd het hulle die koppe van Oreb en Seëb na Gideon toe gebring duskant die Jordaan.

So is die Midianiete aan Israel onderwerp. Hulle het nooit weer herstel nie. In Gideon se tyd was daar vir 40 jaar lank vrede in die land.

Gideon was skaars dood of die Israeliete het weer na die Baäls toe teruggegaan. Hulle het Baäl-Berit hulle god gemaak. Hulle het die HERE hulle God, wat hulle uit die mag van al hulle vyande rondom hulle gered het, net so gelos.

Die Israeliete het weereens vergeet van hulle getroue, heilige God – en hulle moes weereens die gevolge van hulle ongeloof verduur. Verskeie Israelitiese leiers het hulle teen hulle vyande beskerm – met gemengde resultate. Niemand het Gideon se durf of sukses gehad nie. Maar God was nog besig met sy werk en Hy stuur toe 'n engel om 'n buitengewone aankondiging te maak.

Die Israeliete het weer voor die HERE kwaad gedoen. Hy het hulle vir 40 jaar lank aan die Filistyne onderwerp.

Daar was 'n man in Sora met die naam Manoag. Hy was uit die stam van Dan. Sy vrou kon nie kinders hê nie. Die engel van die HERE het by haar gekom en vir haar gesê: “Jy kon nie tot dusver kinders kry nie, maar jy sal binnekort verwag en 'n seun hê. Wees versigtig. Moenie wyn of sterk drank drink nie. Moenie iets eet wat onrein is nie. Jy gaan binnekort geboorte gee aan 'n seun. Jou seun se hare mag nooit geskeer word nie. Hy sal van geboorte af 'n nasireër van God wees. Hy sal die Israeliete uit die hand van die Filistyne bevry.”

Die geboorte het gebeur presies soos die engel gesê het, en die ouers het die kind grootgemaak net soos God hulle beveel het. Jong Simson, wild en ongewoon sterk, het 'n man met 'n geheim geword.

Die vrou het 'n seun in die wêreld gebring. Sy het hom Simson genoem. Die seun het grootgeword en die HERE het hom geseën. Die Gees van die HERE het in Magane-Dan, tussen Sora en Estaol, in hom begin werk. Simson het afgegaan na Timna toe. Hy het daar 'n Filistynse meisie gesien. Toe hy teruggaan, het hy sy ouers van haar vertel: “Ek het in Timna 'n Filistynse meisie gesien. Gaan kry haar dat ek met haar kan trou.”

Sy ouers vra toe vir hom: “Is daar nie iemand tussen die mense van jou stam of onder jou volksgenote met wie jy kan trou nie? Moet jy nou onder die heidense Filistyne 'n vrou vat?”

Simson het vir sy pa gesê: “Kry haar vir my. Ek wil haar hê.” Sy ouers het nie agtergekom dat dit eintlik van die HERE af gekom het nie. Die Filistyne het op daardie stadium oor Israel geheers. God het na 'n geleentheid gesoek om iets aan die Filistyne te doen.

Toe Simson en sy ouers op pad was na Timna toe, het 'n jong leeu hom naby die wingerde van Timna aangeval. Die Gees van die Here het in hom gekom. Hy het met sy kaal hande die leeu se kake uitmekaargeskeur, soos 'n mens 'n bokkie verskeur. Simson het niks daarvan vir sy ouers gesê nie. Hy het in Timna gekom en met die vrou gaan praat. Hy het baie van haar gehou.

Toe hy later weer vir die troue terugkom na Timna toe, het hy afgedraai om na die leeu se karkas te gaan kyk. 'n Swerm bye was besig om daarin heuning te maak. Hy het met sy hand van die heuning uitgehaal en langs die pad daaraan loop en eet. Hy het ook vir sy ouers daarvan gegee. Hulle het ook daarvan geëet, maar nie geweet dat hy die heuning uit die leeu se karkas gehaal het nie.

Sy pa is na die vrou se huis toe om reëlings te tref. Soos dit destyds die gewoonte was onder die jong mans, het Simson 'n onthaal gehou. Toe hulle hom sien, het haar ouers 30 Filistynse jong mans na die fees uitgenooi.

Simson het vir hulle gesê: “Ek wil julle graag 'n raaisel vra. As julle binne die sewe dae van die fees vir my kan sê wat dit beteken, sal ek vir julle 30 hemde en 30 stelle klere gee. As julle dit nie kan oplos nie, gee julle vir my 30 hemde en 30 stelle klere.”

Hulle stem toe in: “Goed, laat ons jou raaisel hoor.”

Simson sê toe vir hulle:

“Uit een wat eet, kom daar iets om te eet.

Uit een wat sterk is, kom daar iets wat soet is.”

Teen die derde dag kon hulle nog nie sê wat dit beteken nie.

Op die vierde dag sê hulle vir Simson se vrou: “Oorreed jou man om die oplossing van die raaisel vir ons te gee. Anders sal ons jou doodmaak en jou pa se huis met vuur verbrand. Het jy ons uitgenooi om ons te verarm?”

Simson se vrou het by hom gaan neul: “Jy het my nie regtig lief nie. Jy haat my. Jy het dan vir my mense 'n raaisel gegee en nie eers vir my gesê wat dit beteken nie!”

Simson het vir haar gesê: “Ek het dit nie eers vir my eie ouers vertel nie. Hoekom sou ek dit vir jou gee?” Elke keer as hy by haar kom, het sy begin neul. So het dit die res van die tyd van die fees gegaan. Op die sewende dag het hy vir haar die oplossing gegee, want sy wou hom nie met rus laat nie. Sy het toe die oplossing vir haar mense gegee.

Net voor sonder op die sewende dag het die mense van die stad

vir Simson die antwoord kom gee:

“Wat is daar wat soeter is as heuning?
En wat is daar wat sterker is as ’n leeu?”

Simson sê toe vir hulle:

“As julle nie met my kalf geploeg het nie,
sou julle nooit die antwoord op my raaisel kon kry nie!”

Die Gees van die HERE het in Simson gekom. Hy het afgegaan na Askelon en 30 van hulle mans doodgeslaan. Hy het hulle besittings afgevat en daaruit 30 stelle klere gevat vir die mans wat die raaisel uitgelê het. Hy was briesend. Hy is toe terug na sy pa se huis toe. Simson se strooijonker het toe met die vrou getrou.

Dit was die tyd toe die koring geoes is. Simson het ’n bokkie gevat om vir sy vrou te gee. Hy het vir homself gesê: “Ek wil by my vrou gaan slaap.” Haar pa wou hom nie laat ingaan nie.

“Ek het dan gedink jy haat haar,” het haar pa gesê. “Ek het jou strooijonker met haar laat trou. Maar haar jonger sussie is mooier as sy. Jy kan haar maar in haar suster se plek kry.”

Simson sê toe vir hulle: “Ek is hierdie keer onskuldig vir wat ek nou met die Filistyne gaan aanvang.” Hy het 300 jakkalse gaan vang en hulle sterte twee-twee aan mekaar vasgemaak. Tussen elke twee sterte het hy ’n fakkels vasgemaak. Hy het die fakkels toe aan die brand gesteek en die jakkalse in die graan van die Filistyne in gejaag. Hy het die gerwe en die miedens, alles laat afbrand. Hy het ook die wingerde en die olyfboorde vernietig.

“Wie het dit gedoen?” het die Filistyne gevra. “Dit was Simson, die skoonseun van die man uit Timna. Hy het Simson se vrou vir sy strooijonker gegee,” het hulle gesê.

Die Filistyne het toe gekom en haar en haar pa laat dood brand. Simson het wraak gesweer: “Omdat julle dit gedoen het, gaan ek nie ophou voordat ek my op julle gewreek het nie.” Hy het hulle met geweld aangeval en ’n geweldige slagting onder hulle aangerig. Hy het daarna in ’n skeur by die rots van Etam gaan woon.

Die Filistyne wou wraak neem en het in Juda kamp opgeslaan. Hulle het Legi geplunder. Die mense van Juda wou toe weet: “Waarom kom maak julle oorlog met ons?”

Die Filistyne het geantwoord: “Ons wil Simson vang. Ons wil hom terugbetaal vir wat hy aan ons gedoen het.”

Uit Juda is toe 3 000 man af na die skeur by Etam. Hulle vra vir Simson: “Onthou jy dan nie dat die Filistyne oor ons heers nie? Wat het jy ons nou aangedoen?”

Hy het hulle geantwoord: “Ek doen maar net met die Filistyne wat hulle aan my gedoen het.”

Die mense van Juda sê toe vir hom: “Ons het jou kom vang om jou aan die Filistyne uit te lewer.”

“Goed,” het Simson vir hulle gesê. “Beloof my net dat julle my nie sal doodmaak nie.”

Hulle het hom belowe: “Ons sal jou nie doodmaak nie. Ons gaan jou net boei en aan die Filistyne uitlewer. Ons sal jou regtig nie doodmaak nie.” Hulle het hom toe met twee nuwe toue vasgemaak en hom weggeneem van die skeur af. Toe hy in Legi aankom, het die Filistyne gejuig en op hom afgestorm. Die Gees van die HERE het Simson sterk gemaak. Hy het die toue om sy arms gebreek asof dit garingdraadjies was wat wegbrand. Die toue waarmee hy geboei was, het van sy hande afgeval. Hy het die vars kakebeen van ’n donkie van die grond af opgeraap en daarmee het hy 1 000 Filistyne doodgeslaan.

Hy sê toe:

“Met ’n donkie se kakebeen
het ek hulle opgestapel,
met die kakebeen van ’n donkie
1 000 man doodgeslaan.”

Nadat hy dit gesê het, het hy die kakebeen weggesmyt. Hulle het die plek toe Kakebeenshoogte genoem.

Simson het toe baie dors geword. Hy het na die HERE geroep: “U het vir u dienskneg hierdie groot oorwinning gegee. Moet ek nou van dors doodgaan en in die mag van heidene val?” Toe het God water uit ’n holte by Legi laat borrel. Simson het gedrink en sy krag het teruggekom. Hy het die fontein in Legi “Roepersfontein” genoem. Dit is vandag nog sy naam.

In die twintig jaar wat die Filistyne oor hulle geheers het, was Simson die leier van Israel.

Simson het op ’n keer Gasa toe gegaan. Hy het daar ’n prostituut ontmoet en by haar gaan slaap. Die mense van Gasa het gehoor dat Simson daar was. Hulle het toe saamgekom en by die ingang van die stad die hele nag deur vir hom gesit en wag. Hulle het deur die nag nie ’n geluid gemaak nie. Hulle het met mekaar afgespreek: “Wanneer dit lig word, gaan ons hom doodmaak.”

Simson het bly lê tot middernag en toe opgestaan. Hy het die deure van die stadspoort met kosyne en al uitgeruk en dit op sy skouers tot bo-op die kruin van die berg teenoor Hebron gedra.

'n Ruk later het Simson op 'n vrou in die Sorekvallei verlief geraak. Haar naam was Delila. Die leiers van die Filistyne het met haar gaan onderhandel: "Pols hom dat jy kan uitvind hoekom hy so sterk is. Vind uit hoe hy oorweldig en vasgebind kan word. Ons sal elkeen vir jou dertien kilogram silwer gee."

Delila het toe vir Simson gevra: "Vertel my 'n bietjie waar jou groot krag vandaan kom. Hoe kan 'n mens die oorhand oor jou kry?"

Simson het haar geantwoord: "As hulle my vasbind met sewe vars boogsnare wat nog nie uitgedroog het nie, sal ek soos enige ander mens wees."

Die leiers van die Filistyne het vir Delila sewe vars boogsnare gebring wat nog klam was. Sy het Simson daarmee vasgebind. Daar het mans in een van die kamers van haar huis weggekrui. Sy sê toe vir hom: "Simson, die Filistyne het jou kom vang!" Hy het die boogsnare gebreek soos toue wat in 'n vlam brand. Niemand het geweet waar sy krag vandaan kom nie.

Daarna het Delila vir Simson gesê: "Jy speel met my. Jy het gelieg. Sê tog nou vir my waarmee kan 'n mens jou vasbind."

Hy het vir haar gesê: "Ek sal so swak soos enige ander mens wees as ek stewig vasgebind word met nuwe toue wat nog vir niks anders gebruik is nie."

Delila het nuwe toue gevat en hom daarmee vasgebind. Sy sê toe vir hom: "Die Filistyne het jou kom vang, Simson!" Daar het weer mans in een van haar kamers weggekrui. Simson het die toue wat om sy arms was, gebreek asof dit garingdrade was.

Delila het vir Simson gevra: "Wanneer gaan jy ophou om met my te mors? Jy lieg nog al die tyd vir my. Sê nou regtig vir my waarmee kan jy bedwing word."

Hy sê toe vir haar: "As jy sewe van my haarlokke in die materiaal op jou weefstoel inweef en met die dwarspen vassteek, sal ek so swak wees soos enige ander mens." Terwyl hy slaap, het sy so gemaak.

Sy roep toe na hom en sê vir hom: "Die Filistyne het jou kom vang, Simson!" Hy het wakker geskrik en die materiaal met dwarspen en al uit die weefstoel geruk.

Sy kerm toe by hom: "Hoe kan jy sê jy is lief vir my, maar jy vertrou my glad nie? Drie keer het jy my al vir die gek gehou. Jy wil nog steeds nie vir my sê waarin jou krag lê nie." So het sy dagin en

daguit by hom bly neul totdat hy gevoel het hy word gek daarvan.

Toe het hy sy hart vir haar oopgemaak. Hy het vir haar gesê: “My hare is nog nooit geskeer nie. Ek is van my geboorte af as nasireër aan God gewy. As my hare afgeskeer word, sal my krag verdwyn. Ek sal dan magteloos wees en soos enige ander mens.”

Delila het gesien dat hy hierdie keer vir haar sy geheim vertel het. Sy het toe die leiers van die Filistyne laat kom en vir hulle gesê: “Hierdie keer moet julle kom! Hy het my nou sy geheim vertel.” Die leiers het gekom en die geld vir die betaling saamgebring. Sy het vir Simson op haar skoot aan die slaap gemaak. Sy het ’n man nadergeroep om Simson se sewe haarlokke af te skeer. Sy het seker gemaak dat hy bedwing sal kan word. Sy krag het verdwyn.

Sy roep toe uit: “Die Filistyne het jou kom vang, Simson!” Hy het uit die slaap wakker geword en by homself gedink: “Ek sal weer uit die ding kom soos al die vorige kere.” Maar hy het nie geweet dat die HERE hom verlaat het nie.

Die Filistyne het hom vasgebind. Hulle het sy oë uitgesteek. Hulle het hom na Gasa toe gevat en hom met twee koperkettings vasgemaak. In die tronk moes hy meel maal. Maar daar het sy afgeskeerde hare weer begin groei.

Die leiers van die Filistyne het saamgekom om in die tempel ’n groot offerfees vir hulle god Dagon te hou. Hulle het vir mekaar gesê: “Ons god het ons vyand Simson in ons hand gegee.”

Toe die mense hom sien, het hulle hulle god begin loof en gesê:

“Ons god het ons vyand
wat ons land so verwoes het
en so baie van ons doodgemaak het,
in ons mag gegee!”

Toe die Filistyne begin dronk word, het hulle gesê: “Bring Simson vir ons dat hy ons kan laat pret hê.” Hulle het Simson uit die tronk gaan haal om hulle te kom vermaak.

Hulle het hom tussen die twee hoofpilare van die tempel laat staan. Hy het vir die seun wat hom aan die hand gelei het, gevra: “Laat my by die pilare van die tempel staan dat ek daarteen kan leun.” Die tempel was propvol mans en vroue. Al die leiers van die Filistyne was daar. Op die dak van die tempel was daar ook omtrent 3 000 mans en vroue wat kom kyk het hoe Simson hulle gaan vermaak. Simson bid toe tot die HERE: “Oppermagtige HERE, dink tog aan my! God, maak my tog net hierdie een keer so sterk dat ek my op die Filistyne kan

wreek vir my oë!” Simson het met sy hande teen die twee hoofpilare gedruk waarop die gebou rus. Hy het met sy regterhand en sy linkerhand elkeen teen ’n pilaar gedruk. Toe bid hy: “Laat my saam met die Filistyne sterf!” Hy het met al sy krag teen die pilare gedruk en die tempel het inmekaargestort op die leiers van die Filistyne en al die mense wat daarin was. Met sy dood het Simson baie meer mense doodgemaak as deur sy hele lewe.

Sy broers en sy hele familie het afgekom en sy lyk kom haal. Hulle het hom saam teruggeneem en hom tussen Sora en Estaol in sy pa, Manoag, se graf begrawe. Simson was twintig jaar lank Israel se leier.

Ná Simson het die Israeliete voortgegaan met hulle patroon van geestelike kompromieë gedurende hierdie hartseer tyd in hulle geskiedenis. Dan verskyn Rut, ’n jong Moabitiese vrou, in God se verhaal. As die Hebreeuse mense gedink het God behoort slegs aan hulle, het hierdie heidense vrou hierdie mite uitgedaag. Rut was lojaal, vasberade, pragtig en slim. Sy het deel geword van koning Dawid se voorgeslag. Nog belangriker, sy was God se keuse om te wys dat God se spesiale geskenk van hoop en lewe – sy plan van verlossing so wyd en diep soos sy goddelike liefde – die hele wêreld insluit.

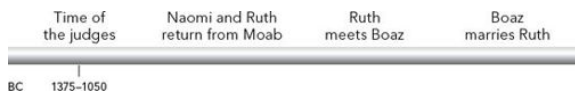
9

The Faith of a Foreign Woman

IN THE DAYS when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.



Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me — even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons — would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me!”

At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When

they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

“Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband’s side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.”

Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The LORD be with you!”

“The LORD bless you!” they answered.

Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?”

The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.”

So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a

drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me — a foreigner?”

Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband — how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

“May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant — though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.”

At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.”

When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her. Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.”

So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

Her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!”

Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said.

“The LORD bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-

redeemers.”

Then Ruth the Moabite said, “He even said to me, ‘Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.’”

Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.”

So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

One day Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi said to her, “My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.”

“I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned — and there was a woman lying at his feet!

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.”

“The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town

know that you are a woman of noble character. Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.”

He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town.

When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?”

Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, “Come over here, my friend, and sit down.” So he went over and sat down.

Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, “Sit here,” and they did so. Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.”

“I will redeem it,” he said.

Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also

acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."

At this, the guardian-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."

(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.

Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!"

Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah."

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Within Ruth's story we catch a glimpse of an amazing tale yet to come—the life of her great-grandson David, the renowned shepherd-

king. But much will take place before David's golden reign. A godly priest and prophet of Israel will first become an important player in this drama. Samuel was himself a child miraculously born out of struggle and promise. After being recognized by the people as the Lord's prophet, Samuel's first order of business was to call the people back to God and subdue the Philistines. Then he had the unenviable task of finding the nation a king. It seemed that nothing happened easily for God's people, but all that happened was part of God's faithful plan.

Die geloof van 'n heidense vrou

In die tyd toe die rigters in Israel opgetree het, het 'n man uit Betlehem in Juda uit die land weggetrek omdat daar 'n swaar hongersnood in die land was. Hy en sy vrou en twee seuns het in die land Moab gaan woon. Die man se naam was Elimelek en sy vrou was Naomi. Hulle twee seuns se name was Maglon en Kiljon. Hulle was Efratiëte uit Betlehem in die land Juda. Hulle het in Moab aangekom.

Terwyl hulle daar gewoon het, is Elimelek dood en het Naomi met haar twee seuns agtergebly. Albei seuns het met Moabitiese vroue getrou. Die een se naam was Orpa en die ander een s'n was Rut. Hulle het ongeveer tien jaar lank daar gebly. In hierdie tyd is Maglon en Kiljon ook dood. Naomi het alleen agtergebly, sonder 'n man en sonder seuns.

Naomi het daar in Moab gehoor dat die HERE sy volk in Juda met goeie oeste geseën het. Toe het Naomi en haar twee skoondogters klaargemaak om uit Moab na Juda toe terug te trek. Sy en haar skoondogters het uit die plek waar sy gebly het, vertrek op pad terug na Juda toe.

Die tyd van die rigters	Naomi en Rut keer terug uit Moab	Rut ontmoet vir Boas	Boas trou met Rut
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v.C. 1375-1050

Sien "Tydlyn van DIE STORIE"

Naomi sê toe vir haar twee skoondogters: "Moenie verder saam met my gaan nie. Gaan liewer terug na julle ouerhuise toe. Mag die HERE julle beloon vir die liefde wat julle aan my en my seuns betoon het. Mag die HERE weer vir julle elkeen 'n man en 'n huis gee."

Toe sy van hulle afskeid neem, het hulle in trane uitgebars. Die skoondogters sê toe: "Nee, ons wil saam met u teruggaan na u mense toe."

Maar Naomi antwoord: "Gaan tog terug, my dogters. Hoekom sou julle saam met my gaan? Ek kan tog nie meer seuns in die wêreld bring wat kan grootword om julle mans te wees nie. Nee, my dogters, gaan eerder terug na julle ouerhuise toe, want ek is te oud om weer te

trou. Selfs al sou dit moontlik wees en ek vanaand by 'n man slaap en geboorte gee aan kinders, sal julle kan wag totdat hulle groot is? Sal julle tot dan toe ongetroud kan bly? Natuurlik nie, my dogters! Dit is vir my baie swaarder as vir julle, want die HERE het baie swaarkry oor my laat kom.”

Die skoondogters het weer begin huil. Orpa het van haar skoonma afskeid geneem, maar Rut wou nie gaan nie.

“Kyk,” sê Naomi vir haar, “jou skoonsuster het teruggegaan na haar mense en na haar gode toe. Gaan jy nou ook maar saam met haar terug.”

Maar Rut antwoord: “Moenie my probeer oorreed om van Ma af weg te gaan nie. Waarheen u ook al gaan, sal ek gaan. Waar u gaan woon, sal ek ook woon. Ma se mense is ook my mense. U God is ook my God. Waar u doodgaan, sal ek ook doodgaan en daar begrawe word. Mag die HERE dit so laat gebeur. Net die dood sal ons skei.” Naomi het besef dat Rut vas besluit het om saam met haar te gaan. Daarom het sy opgehou om haar te probeer oorreed.

Die twee het toe hulle reis voortgesit na Betlehem toe. Toe hulle in Betlehem aankom, was daar 'n opskudding in die dorp oor hulle aankoms. “Is dit dan nie Naomi nie?” het die vroue gevra.

“Moet my nie meer Naomi noem nie,” sê sy vir hulle. “Noem my nou liewer Mara, want die Almagtige het my lewe bitter gemaak. Ek het vol hier weggegaan, maar die HERE het my leeg laat terugkom. Hoekom sal julle my nog Naomi noem as die HERE teen my gedraai het en die Almagtige soveel ellende oor my laat kom het?”

So het Naomi uit Moab teruggekom met haar skoondogter Rut, die jong Moabitiese vrou, by haar. Dit was met die begin van die garsoes dat hulle in Betlehem aangekom het.

In Betlehem was daar 'n welgestelde, invloedryke man met die naam Boas. Hy was familie van Naomi se man, Elimelek.

Eendag vra Rut, die Moabitiese vrou, vir Naomi: “Mag ek gaan are optel op die landerye by iemand wat my sal toelaat om dit te doen?”

Naomi antwoord haar: “Dis goed so, my dogter, gaan gerus.” Rut is na die landerye toe om agter die snyers te gaan are optel. Dit gebeur toe dat sy op die landerye van Boas, die bloedverwant van haar skoonpa, beland.

Boas kom toe juis van Betlehem af en groet sy werknemers: “Die HERE is met julle!” het hy gesê.

“Mag die HERE u seën!” antwoord die snyers.

Toe vra Boas vir sy voorman: “Wie is daardie jong vrou?”

Die voorman antwoord hom: “Sy is die jong vrou uit Moab wat saam met Naomi teruggekom het. Sy het vir my gevra of sy die are agter die snyers mag optel. Sy het nog die hele tyd aanmekaar gewerk, behalwe vir die kort tydjie toe sy daar onder die skuiling gaan rus het.”

Toe loop Boas na haar toe en sê vir Rut: “Luister, my dogter: Bly net hier by ons en tel hier are op. Moenie na ander landerye toe gaan nie. Bly gerus by die vroue wat vir my werk. Kyk op watter deel van die landerye hulle oes en gaan saam met hulle. Ek het die werksmense opdrag gegee om jou nie lastig te val nie. As jy dors word, gaan drink gerus van die water in die houe wat my werkers vir hulle uit die put geskep het.”

Rut het diep voor hom gebuig en hom gevra: “Hoekom is u so goed vir my dat u my uitsonder terwyl ek ’n buitelanders is?”

Boas antwoord haar: “Ek het gehoor van al die liefde en goedheid wat jy ná die dood van jou man aan jou skoonma betoon het. Ek het gehoor dat jy jou ouers en jou geboorteland verlaat het om hier tussen vreemde mense te kom woon. Mag die HERE, die God van Israel, onder wie se vlerke jy kom skuiling soek het, jou ten volle beloon.”

“U laat my goed voel, Meneer,” antwoord sy. “U het my bemoedig deur so vriendelik met my te praat al is ek nie eers een van u slavinne nie.”

Teen etenstyd laat roep Boas haar: “Kom hiernatoe en eet van ons brood en doop dit in die suurwyn.”

Sy het toe saam met die werkers gaan sit. Boas het vir haar geroosterde koring gegee – meer as wat sy kon eet. Toe Rut weg is om weer te gaan are optel, sê Boas vir sy werkers: “Julle moet haar toelaat om are tussen die gerwe op te tel sonder dat sy gepla word. Trek ook van die are uit die gerwe uit en laat dit met opset op die grond val sodat sy dit kan optel. Moenie haar keer om dit op te tel nie.”

Rut het die hele dag lank are opgetel en toe sy dit die aand uitslaan, was dit omtrent ’n halwe mandjievol. Sy het dit opgetel en saamgeneem dorp toe. Haar skoonma het gesien hoe baie sy opgetel het. Rut het ook van die kos wat oorgebly het, vir haar gegee.

“Waar het jy vandag are opgetel?” vra Naomi haar toe. “Mag die HERE die een seën wat jou gehelp het!”

Rut vertel toe vir haar skoonma van die man op wie se landerye sy gewerk het. Sy sê verder: “Die man op wie se landerye ek vandag gewerk het se naam is Boas.”

“Mag hy geseënd wees deur die HERE wat nie opgehou het om getrou te wees aan dié wat lewe en dié wat dood is nie!” sê Naomi vir haar skoondogter. Sy voeg by: “Daardie man is familie van ons. Hy is een van ons lossers.”

Rut vertel toe verder: “Boas het boonop vir my gesê om weer terug te kom en by sy werkers te bly totdat die hele oes ingesamel is.”

“Dis wonderlik!” roep Naomi uit. “Maak soos hy vir jou sê. Bly by sy werkers vir die duur van die oestyd. Daar sal jy veilig wees, maar op ’n ander land kan jy dalk gemolesteer word.”

So het Rut saam met die werkers tot die einde van die garsoes en die graanoes gebly en op Boas se landerye are opgetel. Sy het steeds by haar skoonma gewoon.

Naomi het vir haar skoondogter Rut gesê: “My dogter, dis tyd dat ek vir jou ’n vaste woonplek kry sodat jy in die toekoms versorg sal wees. Jy was mos saam met Boas se diensmeisies. Boas is ’n naby bloedverwant van ons. Kyk, hy gaan vannag gars op die dorsvloer dors. Gaan bad, sit reukwater aan en trek mooi klere aan. Gaan dan na die dorsvloer toe, maar pas op dat Boas jou nie sien voordat hy klaar geëet en gedrink het nie. Let mooi op waar hy gaan slaap. Gaan dan soontoe, en gaan lê by sy voete. Hy sal wel vir jou sê wat om dan te doen.”

“Ek sal presies so maak soos Ma vir my sê,” antwoord Rut. Sy het dié nag na die dorsvloer toe gegaan en gemaak soos haar skoonma gesê het.

Nadat Boas klaar geëet het, was hy baie vrolik. Hy het langs die hoop graan gaan lê om te slaap. Rut het stilletjies nadergekom, sy voete oopgemaak en daar gaan lê. Omtrent middernag skrik Boas wakker en draai om. Groot was sy verbasing toe hy agterkom dat ’n vrou daar by sy voete lê.

“Wie is jy?” vra hy.

“Ek is Rut, u diensmeisie,” antwoord sy. “Ontferm u tog oor my, want u is my lossers.”

“Die HERE seën jou, my dogter!” sê hy. “Jou lojaliteit en getrouheid aan jou skoonma is nou nog meer as voorheen. Jy het nie agter enige jong mans, ryk of arm, aangeloop nie. Wees verseker: Jy hoef oor niks bekommerd te wees nie, my dogter. Ek sal doen wat nodig is, want almal in die dorp weet jy is ’n eerbare vrou. Daar is egter één probleem. Dit is so dat ek een van die lossers is, maar daar is ’n ander man wat nader verwant aan jou is as ek. Bly vannag hier. Môreoggend sal ek met hom praat. As hy gewillig is om vir jou as lossers op

te tree, sal hy dit doen. Maar as hy nie gewillig is nie, dan sal ek so waar as die HERE leef met jou trou. Bly nou lê tot môre-oggend.”

Rut het by Boas se voete bly lê tot die oggend toe. Voordat dit lig genoeg was dat mense mekaar kon herken, het sy opgestaan. Boas het vir haar gesê: “Niemand moet weet dat hier ’n vrou by die dorsvloer was nie.”

Boas het ook vir haar gesê: “Bring die mantel wat jy aanhet en hou dit oop.” Hy meet toe ses mate gars vir haar daarin af en help haar om dit op haar rug te tel. Daarna is Boas dorp toe.

Toe Rut by haar skoonma aankom, vra Naomi: “Wat het gebeur, my dogter?”

Rut vertel toe vir Naomi alles wat Boas gedoen het. Sy voeg by: “Hy het my selfs ses mate gars gegee en gesê: ‘Jy kan nie met leë hande by jou skoonma aankom nie.’”

Naomi sê toe vir haar: “My dogter, wees maar geduldig totdat ons hoor wat verder gebeur. Die man sal nie rus voordat hy die saak vandag nog opgelos het nie.”

Boas het na die dorpspoort gegaan en daar gaan sit en wag. Toe die lossers van wie hy gepraat het, daar verbykom, roep Boas hom. “Kom hiernatoe, vriend. Ek wil met jou praat.” Hy het by hom gaan sit.

Toe roep Boas tien van die leiers van die dorp nader en vra hulle om as getuies op te tree. Boas sê vir die lossers: “Naomi wat uit Moab teruggekom het, wil die landerye wat aan ons bloedverwant Elimelek behoort het, verkoop. Ek het gedink ek moet met jou hieroor praat sodat jy as lossers kan optree as jy wil. As jy die landerye wil hê, moet jy hier in die teenwoordigheid van hierdie getuies verklaar dat jy as lossers sal optree. Maar as jy dit nie wil doen nie, moet jy my dadelik sê, want ek is die volgende lossers ná jou.”

Die man antwoord hom: “Dis goed. Ek sal as lossers optree.”

Toe sê Boas vir hom: “Hou net in gedagte dat wanneer jy die landerye van Naomi loskoop, jy ook met Rut, die Moabitese weduwee, sal moet trou. Op hierdie manier sal sy kinders kan hê wat haar man se naam kan voortsit en die landerye in die familie hou.”

“In so ’n geval wil ek nie as lossers optree nie,” antwoord die naaste lossers, “want dit kan my eie erfporsie in gevaar stel. Jy kan gerus as lossers optree, want ek wil nie.”

Destyds was dit die gebruik in Israel by die lossingsproses of die oordrag van eiendomsregte dat die transaksie soos volg bevestig word: Die een wat sy regte aan iemand anders oordra, moet ook sy skoen uittrek en dit vir die ander party gee. Dit het die transaksie bekragtig.

Die ander lossen trek toe sy skoene uit en sê vir Boas: “Jy kan dit koop.”

Toe sê Boas vir die leiers en die mense om hulle: “Julle is getuie dat ek vandag Elimelek, Kiljon en Maglon se eiendom by Naomi loskoop.

“Saam met die landerye verkry ek ook vir Rut, die Moabitiese weduwee van Maglon, as my vrou. Op hierdie manier sal die grond in die naam van die familie bly. So sal die naam van die gestorwene nie onder sy broers en uit die poort van sy woonplek uitgewis word nie. Julle is vandag almal getuie daarvan.”

Toe sê die leiers en almal wat daar staan: “Ons is getuie. Mag die ERE die vrou wat nou in jou huis inkom, maak soos Ragel en Lea, van wie die hele volk afgestam het. Mag jy aansien in Efrata en beroemdheid in Betlehem verwerf. Mag die HERE deur hierdie vrou vir jou afstammelinge gee wat sal wees soos ons stamvader Peres, die seun van Tamar en Juda.”

Boas het toe met Rut getrou. Sy het sy vrou geword. Hy het by haar geslaap en die HERE het haar laat swanger word. Sy het geboorte gegee aan ’n seun. Toe sê die vroue van die dorp vir Naomi: “Prys die HERE wat vandag vir jou ’n lossen gegee het. Mag hy beroemd word in Israel. Mag hierdie kind vir jou vreugde bring en vir jou sorg in jou ouderdom. Want hy is die seun van jou skoon dogter wat vir jou so lief is en wat vir jou meer beteken as sewe seuns!”

Naomi het die seuntjie op haar skoot getel en hom as haar eie kind beskou. Die buurvroue het hom Obed genoem. Hulle het gesê: “Daar is ’n seun vir Naomi gebore.” Hy het die pa geword van Isai en die oupa van Dawid.

In Rut se storie kry ons ’n kykie op ’n wonderlike verhaal wat nog moet gebeur – die lewe van haar agterkleinkind Dawid, die bekende skaapwagter-koning. Maar daar sou nog baie gebeur voor Dawid se goue heerskappy. ’n Goddelike priester en profeet van Israel sal eers ’n belangrike speler in hierdie drama word. Samuel self is wonderbaarlik gebore uit stryd en belofte. Nadat hy deur die mense erken is as God se profeet, was Samuel se eerste taak om die mense terug te roep na God, en die Filistyne te onderdruk. Toe het hy die onbenydenswaardige taak gehad om die nasie se koning te vind. Dit wou voorkom of niks maklik gebeur vir God se mense nie, maar alles wat gebeur het, was deel van God se getroue plan.

Standing Tall, Falling Hard

THERE WAS A CERTAIN MAN from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"



Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

“Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.”

Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I asked the LORD for him.”

When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, “After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always.”

“Do what seems best to you,” her husband Elkanah told her. “Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word.” So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, and she said to him, “Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.” And he worshiped the LORD there.

Then Hannah prayed and said:

“My heart rejoices in the LORD;

in the LORD my horn is lifted high.

My mouth boasts over my enemies,

for I delight in your deliverance.

“There is no one holy like the LORD;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.”

Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.” Then they would go home. And the LORD was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, “Here I am.” And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down.

Again the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

“My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

A third time the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family — from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’”

Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.”

Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

“What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

And Samuel’s word came to all Israel.

Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four

thousand of them on the battlefield. When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the LORD bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”

So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

When the ark of the LORD’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, “What’s all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?”

When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. “A god has come into the camp,” they said. “Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. We’re doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!”

So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.

Eli heard the outcry and asked, “What is the meaning of this uproar?”

The man hurried over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes had failed so that he could not see. He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.”

Eli asked, “What happened, my son?”

The man who brought the news replied, "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured."

When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

No doubt the loss of his sons staggered Eli, but the loss of the ark of the covenant hit him even harder. The sacred ark in pagan hands? Unthinkable! The very presence of God, now captured by the Philistines? A tragedy!

The Philistines understood what a symbolic victory they had won and promptly placed the ark next to the statue of their god Dagon in the great temple in Ashdod, one of the five fortified Philistine cities. But God would not be mocked by the false gods of the Philistines. Israel had been brought here in the first place for the very purpose of showing the one true God to these people. So the Dagon statue tumbled to pieces on the temple floor.

Next, God afflicted the Philistines with tumors, and after seven months of pure misery, the Philistines put the ark on a cart and sent it back to the Israelites, who kept it in the border town of Kiriath Jearim for 20 years, wondering what to do with it.

Meanwhile, Samuel insisted that the Israelites stop worshiping pagan deities and return to the true God. He led the people in successfully subduing the Philistines. But the people stubbornly thought that having a king like everybody else would solve their leadership problems.

When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations

have.”

But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us,” this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: “Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.”

Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, “This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female

servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.”

But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”

When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. The LORD answered, “Listen to them and give them a king.”

Then Samuel said to the Israelites, “Everyone go back to your own town.”

There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish

son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bekorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.

Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys." So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them.

When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, "Come, let's go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us."

But the servant replied, "Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take."

"Good," Saul said to his servant. "Come, let's go." So they set out for the town where the man of God was.

They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel, coming toward them on his way up to the high place.

Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel: "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me."

When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD said to him, "This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people."

Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, "Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?"

"I am the seer," Samuel replied. "Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and in the morning I will send

you on your way and will tell you all that is in your heart. As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line?"

Saul answered, "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?"

Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you ruler over his inheritance? When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, 'The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?"'

"After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you."

As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day.

Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the LORD at Mizpah and said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.' But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your disasters and calamities. And you have said, 'No, appoint a king over us.' So now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and clans."

When Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was taken. Finally Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?"

And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies."

They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people."

Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the LORD. Then Samuel dismissed the people to go to their own homes.

Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched.

The future king found hiding among the supplies may have been history's most inauspicious royal inauguration. The rest of Saul's story is just as unpredictable. Though he was chosen by God, he was a jealous, impatient and impetuous man. Yet he led the people into battle, and they rallied to support a strong central leader, forging a nation out of local tribes.

Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you."

But Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel."

The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you."

When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with everyone? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said.

When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger. He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out together as one. When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and those of Judah thirty thousand.

They told the messengers who had come, "Say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, 'By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be rescued.'" When the messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, they were elated. They said to the Ammonites, "Tomorrow we will surrender to you, and you can do to us whatever you like."

The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

The people then said to Samuel, "Who was it that asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Turn these men over to us so that we may put them to death."

But Saul said, "No one will be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel."

Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship." So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. Now you have a king as your leader.

“When you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, ‘No, we want a king to rule over us’ — even though the LORD your God was your king. Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God — good! But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.

“Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call on the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.”

Then Samuel called on the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel.

The people all said to Samuel, “Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.”

“Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish.”

After Samuel’s stern warning, Saul attempted to reign successfully, but he seemed always to be one step behind common sense. When facing battle, he failed to measure the strength of the enemy, then impulsively took matters into his own hands while waiting for Samuel. What sort of king was this?

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.

Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Mikdash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. The rest of the men he sent back to their homes.

Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. Then Saul had the trumpet blown throughout the land and said, "Let the Hebrews hear!" So all Israel heard the news: "Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become obnoxious to the Philistines." And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.

The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Mikdash, east of Beth Aven. When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.

"What have you done?" asked Samuel.

Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikdash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

"You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his

own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'"

So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim — two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah.

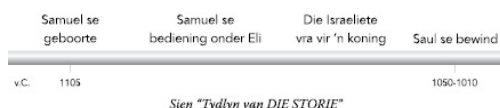
Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs — everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

Saul sinned against God again. God had instructed him to destroy all of the Amalekite property, but Saul and his men instead kept a good share of it. Sparing the good livestock, Saul claimed he intended to offer them as animal sacrifices to God. It was still disobedience. Samuel, sad that Saul had failed as king, warned Saul that his time was up. It was time to find a successor. But having enjoyed the perks of high office, Saul would not go without resistance.

Staan sterk, val hard

In Rama, in die heuwelgebied van Efraim, het daar 'n Suffiet gewoon met die naam Elkana. Hy was die seun van Jerogam en die kleinseun van Elihu uit die familie van Togu, van die familiegroep van Suf, uit Efrata. Hy het twee vroue gehad, Hanna en Peninna. Peninna het kinders gehad, maar Hanna was kinderloos.

Elke jaar het Elkana en sy gesin na Silo toe gegaan om daar te aanbid en offers vir die HERE, die Almagtige, te bring. Die priesters van die HERE daar was Hofni en Pinehas, die twee seuns van Eli. Wanneer Elkana sy offers bring, het hy gewoonlik gedeeltes van die offermaaltyd aan Peninna en haar kinders gegee. Al het hy Hanna baie liefgehad, kon hy vir haar net een deel van die offer gee, omdat die HERE nie vir haar kinders gegee het nie. Maar Peninna het Hanna oor haar kinderloosheid gespot en verneder. Dit het jaar na jaar gebeur wanneer hulle na die huis van die HERE gegaan het. Dit het Hanna so laat huil dat sy nie wou eet nie. “Wat makeer, Hanna?” het Elkana dan gevra. “Hoekom eet jy nie? Hoekom is jy so verdrietig net omdat jy nie kinders het nie? Jy het mos vir my! Is ek dan nie beter as tien seuns nie?”



Op 'n keer toe hulle weer by Silo was, het Hanna ná die offermaaltyd na die heiligdom van die HERE gegaan. Die priester Eli het op sy gewone plek by die ingang gesit. Hanna was baie ontsteld en terwyl sy onbedaarlik huil, het sy tot die HERE gebid. Sy het 'n gelofte gemaak: “O HERE, Almagtige, as U tog net my verdriet wil raaksien en my gebed verhoor en vir my 'n seun gee, sal ek hom vir U teruggee. Lewenslank sal hy aan U behoort. As teken daarvan sal sy hare nooit gesny word nie.”

Terwyl sy besig was om te bid, het Eli haar dopgehou. Haar lippe het beweeg, maar 'n mens kon niks hoor nie. Hy dink toe sy is dronk.

“Moet jy dan besope hier aankom?” sê hy. “Los die drank uit!”

“O nee, Meneer!” antwoord sy. “Ek het nie wyn of sterk drank gedrink nie. Ek is net diep bedroef. Ek het maar net my hart voor die HERE oopgemaak. Asseblief, moenie dink ek is ’n slegte vrou nie. Ek het so lank gebid omdat ek baie hartseer is.”

“Gaan gerus,” sê Eli. “Mag die God van Israel vir jou gee wat jy Hom gevra het.”

“Baie dankie, Meneer!” antwoord sy en gaan terug om te eet. Sy was nie meer hartseer nie.

Die gesin het vroeg die volgende oggend opgestaan. Nadat hulle die HERE aanbid het, is hulle terug huis toe in Rama. Elkana het by Hanna geslaap en die HERE het Hanna se versoek onthou. Sy het swanger geword en op die regte tyd geboorte gegee aan ’n seun. Sy het hom Samuel genoem, “want,” het sy gesê, “ek het hom van die HERE afgesmeek.”

Die volgende jaar het Elkana, Peninna en haar kinders soos gewoonlik vertrek om vir die HERE te gaan offer. Hanna het egter nie saamgegaan nie. Sy het vir haar man gesê: “Wag totdat die kindjie gespeen is. Dan sal ek hom neem om voor die HERE te verskyn en lewenslank daar te bly.”

“Doen wat jy dink die beste is,” antwoord Elkana. “Bly hier totdat hy gespeen is, en mag die HERE sy woord waar maak.” Sy het dus tuis gebly en die baba versorg.

Toe die kindjie gespeen is, het Hanna hom na die heiligdom van die HERE in Silo geneem. Hulle het ’n driejaaroud bul as offer saamgeneem en ook omtrent sestien kilogram meel en wyn. Nadat hulle die bul geoffer het, neem hulle die seuntjie na Eli toe. “Meneer, onthou u my?” vra Hanna. “Ek is die vrou wat hier gestaan het en tot die HERE gebid het. Ek het die HERE gevra om my hierdie kind te gee en Hy het my gebed verhoor. Nou gee ek hom terug vir die HERE. Hy sal lewenslank aan die HERE behoort.”

Daarna het hulle die HERE daar aanbid.

Toe het Hanna gebid:

“My hart is bly in die HERE!

Kyk hoe het die HERE my geseën!

Nou kan ek my vyande antwoord

terwyl ek my verbly oor u verlossing.

“Niemand is heilig soos die HERE nie!

Niemand is U gelyke nie;

daar is geen Rots soos ons God nie.”

Elke jaar het sy ma vir hom 'n manteltjie gemaak en dit saamgebring wanneer sy saam met haar man gekom het om te offer. Dan het Eli vir Elkana en sy vrou geseën en gesê: “Mag die HERE jou uit hierdie vrou nog kinders gee in die plek van hierdie een wat sy van die HERE afgesmeek het.” Daarna het hulle huis toe gegaan. Die HERE het Hom oor Hanna ontferm. Sy het weer swanger geword en nog drie seuns en twee dogters in die wêreld gebring. Intussen het Samuel voor die HERE grootgeword.

Intussen het die seun Samuel die HERE gedien onder Eli se toesig. In daardie tyd was boodskappe van die HERE baie skaars en visioene was seldsaam.

Eli was toe al feitlik blind. Een nag terwyl hy nog slaap en die lamp van God nog gebrand het en Samuel in die heiligdom van die HERE by die ark van God gelê en slaap het, het die HERE geroep: “Samuel!”

“Ek kom!” antwoord Samuel. Hy spring op en hardloop na Eli toe. “Hier is ek. U het my geroep!”

“Nee, ek het jou nie geroep nie,” antwoord Eli. “Gaan maar terug bed toe.” Hy maak toe so.

Die HERE het hom weer geroep. Samuel het weer uit die bed gespring en na Eli toe hardloop. “Hier is ek,” sê hy. “U het my geroep.”

“Ek het jou nie geroep nie, my seun,” sê Eli. “Gaan slaap maar weer.”

Samuel het nie vooraf geweet dat dit die HERE is nie, want die HERE het nog nie met hom gepraat nie.

Die HERE roep hom toe vir die derde keer, en weer hardloop hy na Eli toe. “Hier is ek,” sê hy. “U het my tog geroep.”

Toe besef Eli dat dit die HERE is wat die seun geroep het. Daarom sê hy vir Samuel: “Gaan lê en as iemand weer na jou roep, sê dan: ‘Ja, HERE, u dienaar luister.’” Samuel is weer terug na sy bed toe.

Die HERE kom staan toe daar en roep soos die vorige kere: “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel het geantwoord: “Ja, HERE, u dienaar luister.”

Die HERE sê vir Samuel: “Ek is op die punt om 'n skokkende ding in Israel te doen. Ek gaan nou al my dreigemente teen Eli en sy gesin uitvoer. Ek het hom voortdurend gewaarsku dat Ek sy gesin gaan straf oor die verkeerde dade van sy seuns. Hy het geweet dat hulle hulle skandelik gedra, maar hy het hulle nie bestraf nie. Daarom lê Ek 'n

eed af dat die sondes van Eli en sy seuns nooit deur diereoffers of graanoffers versoen sal word nie.”

Samuel het tot die oggend bly lê. Toe het hy opgestaan en soos gewoonlik die deure van die heiligdom van die HERE oopgemaak. Hy was bang om vir Eli te vertel wat die HERE vir hom gesê het. Maar Eli het hom geroep: “Samuel, my seun!”

“Hier is ek,” antwoord Samuel.

“Wat het die HERE vir jou gesê? Moenie iets vir my wegsteek nie. Mag God met jou afreken as jy my nie alles sê wat jy gehoor het nie!” Toe vertel Samuel alles vir Eli. Hy het niks weggesteek nie. “Dit is die HERE se wil,” sê Eli. “Hy is die HERE. Laat Hom doen wat Hy dink goed is.”

Samuel het grootgeword, en die HERE was met hom. Alles wat hy gesê het, het waar geword. Almal in Israel oor die hele land het geweet dat Samuel as profeet van die HERE betroubaar was. Die HERE het weer in Silo verskyn en daar sy woord aan Samuel geopenbaar.

Samuel se woorde was aan die hele Israel gerig.

Israel het opgetrek om teen die Filistyne oorlog te maak. Hulle het by Eben-Haeser kamp opgeslaan en die Filistyne by Afek. Hulle het stelling ingeneem teenoor Israel. In die geveg het die Filistyne Israel verslaan en 4 000 soldate doodgemaak. Ná die geveg het die Israëliete teruggegaan na hulle kamp toe. Die leiers het gevra: “Hoekom het die HERE toegelaat dat die Filistyne ons verslaan? Kom ons kry die verbondsark van die HERE wat in Silo is en neem dit saam na die slagveld toe. Dit sal ons red van ons vyande.”

Hulle stuur toe mense na Silo en gaan haal die verbondsark van die HERE, die Almagtige, Hy wat oor die gerubs troon. Hofni en Pinehas, die seuns van Eli, was by die verbondsark.

Toe die Israëliete sien dat die verbondsark van die HERE die kamp ingebring word, het hulle gejuig van blydschap. Die gejuig was so hard dat die grond gebewe het. “Wat gaan aan?” het die Filistyne gevra. “Waaroor gaan al die geskreeu in die kamp van die Hebreërs?”

Toe hulle hoor dat die verbondsark van die HERE daar aangekom het, was hulle paniekbevange. “Hulle God het in hulle kamp aangekom!” het hulle uitgeroep. “Dit is ’n ramp! So iets het nog nooit gebeur nie! Wie kan ons red van hierdie magtige God van Israel? Dit is dieselfde God wat Egipte in die woestyn met allerlei plae geteister het. Filistyne, julle sal met mag en mening moet veg! As julle dit nie doen nie, sal ons die slawe van die Hebreërs word soos hulle ons slawe was!”

Die Filistyne het toe desperaat geveg en Israel weereens verslaan. Dit was 'n groot slagting: 30 000 Israëliete het daardie dag gesterf. Dié wat dit oorleef het, het na hulle tente toe gevlug. Die ark van God is ook afgeneem en Hofni en Pinehas, die twee seuns van Eli, is doodgemaak.

Iemand uit die stam van Benjamin het dié dag van die slagveld af na Silo toe gehardloop. Hy het sy klere geskeur en daar was as op sy kop as teken van rou. Eli het langs die pad gesit en wag op nuus van die veldslag, want hy was bekommerd oor die ark van God. Toe die boodskapper daar aankom en vertel wat gebeur het, het die mense in die dorp hulle ontsteltenis uitgeskreue.

“Waaroor is al die geraas en oproer?” het Eli gevra.

Die boodskapper het na Eli toe gehardloop. Eli was 98 jaar oud en byna blind. Hy sê vir Eli: “Ek kom so pas van die oorlogsfront af.”

“Wat het gebeur?” vra Eli.

“Israel is verslaan,” antwoord die boodskapper, “en baie Israëliete het gesneuwel. U twee seuns, Hofni en Pinehas, het ook gesneuwel en die ark van God is buitgemaak.”

Toe die boodskapper sê wat met die ark gebeur het, het Eli daar by die poort agteroor van sy stoel af geval. Hy het sy nek gebreek en gesterf, want hy was baie oud en oorgewig. Hy het Israel 40 jaar lank gelei.

Die verlies aan sy seuns het beslis vir Eli ontstel, maar die verlies aan die verbondsark het hom harder getref. Die heilige ark is in heidense hande? Ondenikbaar! Die teenwoordigheid van God nou gevange geneem deur die Filistyne? 'n Tragedie!

Die Filistyne het verstaan wat 'n simboliese oorwinning hulle behaal het en het die ark dadelik langs die standbeeld van hulle god Dagon in die groot tempel in Asdod, een van die vyf versterkte Filistynse stede, gesit. Maar God sou nie deur die vals gode van die Filistyne gespot word nie. Israel is in die eerste plek hierheen gebring om die een ware God aan hierdie mense te wys. Daarom het die Dagon-standbeeld in stukkies op die tempelvloer geval.

Volgende het God die Filistyne met swere gestraf, en na sewe maande van absolute ongelukkigheid, het die Filistyne die ark op 'n wa gelaai en dit teruggestuur vir die Israëliete, wat dit vir twintig jaar op die grensdorp Kirjat-Jearim gehou het terwyl hulle gewonder het wat om daarmee te doen.

Intussen het Samuel daarop aangedring dat die Israëliete ophou om heidense gode te aanbid en dat hulle moet terugkeer na die ware God.

Hy het die mense in 'n suksesvolle oorwinning oor die Filistyne gelei. Maar die mense het koppig gedink dat om 'n koning te hê, soos al die ander nasies, hulle leierskapsprobleme sou oplos.

Toe Samuel ouer begin word, het hy sy seuns as rigters oor Israel aangestel. Sy twee oudste seuns, Joël en Abia, was rigters in Berseba. Hulle het anders as Samuel opgetree en was ingestel op eie gewin en omkoperij, en selfs in die regspraak was hulle korrupt.

Die leiers van Israel het toe by Rama bymekaargekom en die saak met Samuel bespreek. “Kyk,” sê hulle vir hom, “u is nou al bejaard en u seuns volg nie u voorbeeld nie. Stel vir ons 'n koning aan soos die gebruik is by al die ander nasies.”

Samuel was baie ontsteld oor hierdie versoek en het eers die HERE gaan raadpleeg. “Maak soos hulle sê,” antwoord die HERE, “want dis nie vir jou wat hulle verwerp nie, maar vir My wat hulle nie meer as hulle koning wil hê nie. Sedert Ek hulle uit Egipte verlos het, het hulle My aanhoudend verwerp en ander gode gedien. Nou maak hulle net so met jou ook. Doen soos hulle vra, maar waarsku hulle ernstig oor wat 'n koning met hulle sal doen.”

Samuel het toe die waarskuwing van die HERE aan die mense oorgedra. “Dis hoe 'n koning met julle sal maak,” sê hy. “Die koning sal die reg hê om julle seuns op te roep vir sy diens, sommige by sy wa en perderuiters, ander om voor sy wa uit te hardloop. Sommige sal bevelvoerders van sy troepe wees en ander sal sy landerye ploeg en oes; nog ander sal vir hom wapens maak en toerusting vir sy strydwaens. Julle dogters sal hy vat om vir hom salf te meng, en om te kook en te bak. Hy sal die beste landerye, wingerde en olyfboorde vir hom vat en aan sy amptenare gee. Hy sal 'n tiende van julle oeste neem en dit ook aan sy amptenare en personeel gee. Julle slawe en slavinne, die beste van julle jong manne en julle donkies sal hy neem en vir sy eie werk gebruik. Hy sal 'n tiende van julle kleinvee vat. Julle sal niks anders as sy slawe wees nie. Wanneer dit gebeur, sal julle om hulp roep oor die koning wat julle verkies het, maar dan sal die HERE julle nie antwoord nie.”

Maar die volk wou nie na Samuel se waarskuwings luister nie. “Nee, ons wil nogtans 'n koning hê!” het hulle gesê. “Ons wil soos die nasies om ons wees. Ons koning moet oor ons regeer en ons op die slagveld lei.”

Samuel het die HERE vertel wat die mense gesê het. Die HERE se antwoord was: “Doen soos hulle sê en stel 'n koning oor hulle aan.”

Samuel sê toe vir die manne van Israel: “Gaan nou elkeen na sy huis

toe.”

Daar was 'n welvarende man uit die stam van Benjamin. Sy naam was Kis. Hy was die seun van Abiël en kleinseun van Seror, uit die familie van Bekorat en die familiegroep van Afiag. Sy seun Saul was baie aantreklik, meer as enigiemand anders in Israel. Hy was van sy skouers af 'n kop langer as enieen van sy volksgenote.

Eendag het die donkies van Kis, Saul se pa, weggeraak. Hy sê toe vir Saul: “Vat een van die jong manne saam met jou en gaan soek na die donkies.” Hulle het oral in die Efraimsberge gesoek, in die Salisa-omgewing, die Saälimgebied en die hele Jeministreek. Hulle kon die donkies egter nêrens kry nie.

Toe hulle die gebied van Suf binnegaan, sê Saul vir die jong man: “Kom ons gaan terug huis toe. Teen hierdie tyd sal my pa meer bekommerd wees oor ons as oor die donkies!”

Maar die jong man sê: “Wag 'n bietjie, daar is 'n man van God in hierdie dorp. Hy word deur almal hoog geag omdat alles wat hy sê waar word. Laat ons eers na hom toe gaan. Dalk kan hy vir ons sê waar die donkies is.”

“Dis goed so,” stem Saul in, “kom ons probeer.” Hulle gaan toe na die dorp waar die man van God was.

Hulle het teen die steilte opgegaan. Toe hulle die dorp binnekom, kom Samuel hulle tegemoet terwyl hy op pad was om op te gaan na die hoogte toe.

Die HERE het al die vorige dag vertroulik aan Samuel bekendgemaak dat Saul sou kom. Hy het gesê: “Môre omtrent hierdie tyd sal Ek 'n man uit Benjamin na jou toe stuur. Salf hom tot leier van my volk Israel. Hy sal hulle red van die mag van die Filistyne, want Ek het die nood van my volk raakgesien en hulle hulpgeroep gehoor.”

Toe Samuel vir Saul sien, sê die HERE vir hom: “Dit is die man waarvan Ek jou vertel het. Hy sal oor my volk regeer.”

Op daardie oomblik gaan Saul na Samuel toe en vra: “Kan u asseblief vir my sê waar die huis van die siener is?”

“Ek is die siener!” antwoord Samuel. “Gaan solank voor my teen die hoogte uit na die offerplek toe. Daar sal ons saam eet. Môre-oggend sal ek vir jou sê wat jy wil weet en jou dan laat gaan. En moet jou nie meer bekommer oor jou pa se donkies wat drie dae gelede weggeraak het nie, want hulle is alreeds gevind. Die hoop van die hele Israel is egter op jou en jou familie gerig.”

Saul antwoord hom: “Ek is maar net 'n Benjaminiëter, die kleinste

stam in Israel. My familie is boonop die geringste van al die families van ons stam! Hoekom praat u so met my?”

Samuel neem toe 'n kruik met olie, gooi dit op Saul se kop uit, soen hom en sê: “Die HERE het jou gesalf as leier oor sy besitting. Wanneer jy vandag van my af weggaan, sal jy twee persone by Ragel se graf naby Selsag op die grens van Benjamin teëkom. Hulle sal vir jou vertel: ‘Die donkies wat jy gesoek het, is gekry. Nou is jou pa oor jou bekommerd en vra: Ek wonder waar is my seun!’

“Daarna sal jy aankom by Gibeon van God waar die garnisoen van die Filistyne is. Naby die dorp sal jy 'n klompie profete teëkom op pad vanaf die altaar op die hoogte. Hulle sal met begeleiding van 'n harp, 'n tamboerlyn, 'n fluit en 'n lier profeteer. Dan sal die Gees van die HERE met krag op jou kom en jy sal soos hulle profeteer en 'n ander mens word. Ná hierdie tekens moet jy doen wat nodig is, want God is met jou.”

Toe Saul omdraai om te gaan, het God sy hart verander. Al die tekens waarvan Samuel gepraat het, het daardie dag gebeur.

Samuel het die hele volk voor die HERE by Mispa bymekaargeroep en die volgende boodskap van die HERE God aan die Israëliete oorgedra: “Ek het Israel uit Egipte gelei en julle gered uit die mag van Egipte en al die koninkryke wat julle verdruk het. Hoewel Ek julle van al die onheil en ellende verlos het, het julle My verwerp en gesê: ‘Nee, ons wil liever 'n koning hê!’ Kom stel julle nou op voor die HERE volgens julle stamme en familie-groepe.”

Samuel het toe die stamleiers nadergeroep voor die HERE en die stam van Benjamin is aangewys. Toe het Samuel al die families in die stam van Benjamin nadergeroep voor die HERE, en die familie van Matar is aangewys. Daarna is Saul, die seun van Kis aangewys. Maar toe hulle hom soek, kon hulle hom nie kry nie. Hulle vra toe vir die HERE: “Maar is die man al hier?”

Toe antwoord die HERE: “Hy kruip weg agter die mense se reisgoed.”

Hulle het hom daar gekry en vorentoe laat kom. Hy was van sy skouers af 'n kop langer as enigiemand anders. Samuel sê toe vir die volk: “Dit is die man wat die HERE gekies het om julle koning te wees. Daar is niemand in Israel wat sy gelyke is nie!”

Toe roep al die mense: “Mag die koning lank lewe!”

Daarna het Samuel die mense ingelig oor die regte en verpligtings van 'n koning. Hy het dit op 'n rol neergeskryf en dit voor die HERE neergesit. Toe het Samuel die mense huis toe gestuur.

Saul het teruggegaan na sy huis in Gibea. Hy was vergesel van 'n groep dapper manne wie se harte deur God aangeraak is.

Die toekomstige koning wat gevind is waar hy agter die reisgoed weggekruip het, is dalk die mees onheilspellende koninklike inhuldiging in die geskiedenis. Die res van Saul se storie is net so onvoorspelbaar. Alhoewel hy deur God gekies is, was hy 'n jaloerse, ongeduldige en voortvarende man. Tog het hy die mense in oorlog gelei, en hulle het saamgestaan om 'n sterk sentrale leier te ondersteun, en 'n nasie uit plaaslike stamme gevorm.

Koning Nagas van Ammon het met sy leër teen die Israelitiese stad Jabes-Gilead opgetrek. Maar die inwoners van Jabes het vir vrede gevra: “Maak 'n ooreenkoms met ons en ons sal u onderdanig wees,” het hulle gesê.

“Goed,” sê Nagas, “maar net op hierdie voorwaarde: dat ek die regteroog van elkeen van julle uitsteek tot die skande van almal in Israel!”

“Gee ons sewe dae om boodskappers deur die hele Israel te stuur!” antwoord die leiers van Jabes. “As niemand van ons bloedverwante tot ons redding kom nie, sal ons tot jou voorwaardes instem.”

Die boodskappers het by Gibea, Saul se tuisdorp, aangekom en vir die mense van die dreigende ramp vertel. Almal het in tranen uitgebars. Saul het toe van die landerye af gekom waar hy besig was om te ploeg. Met sy tuiskoms vra hy: “Wat gaan aan dat almal so huil?” Hulle vertel hom toe van die boodskap van Jabes.

Maar die Gees van God het met krag oor Saul gekom en hy het baie kwaad geword. Hy neem toe twee osse, sny hulle in stukke en stuur dit met boodskappers deur die hele Israel en laat weet: “Dis wat sal gebeur met die beste van elkeen wat nie saam met Saul en Samuel optrek nie!” Die skrik van die HERE het die mense oorval en hulle het soos een man opgeruk. Saul het hulle by Besek bymekaargemaak. Daar was 300 afdelings uit Israel en 30 afdelings uit Juda.

Saul het die boodskappers na Gilead toe teruggestuur met die woorde: “Ons sal julle môre op die middel van die dag kom verlos!” Daar was groot blydschap in die stad toe hulle hierdie boodskap hoor. Die inwoners van Jabes laat weet toe vir hulle vyande: “Ons sal môre uitkom na julle toe en dan kan julle met ons maak soos julle wil.”

Voeg die volgende môre het Saul sy leër in drie afdelings verdeel. Voor dagbreek het hy 'n verrassingsaanval teen die Ammoniete geloods en hulle tot die middag toe afgemaai. Die oorblyfsel van hulle leër was so verjaag dat daar nie twee van hulle bymekaargebly het nie.

Toe sê die volk vir Samuel: “Waar is daardie mense wat gesê het Saul moenie oor ons regeer nie? Bring hulle sodat ons hulle kan doodmaak!”

Maar Saul het geantwoord: “Niemand sal vandag tereggestel word nie, want die HERE het Israel verlos!”

Daarna sê Samuel vir die mense: “Kom ons gaan almal Gilgal toe en herbevestig Saul se koningskap.” Hulle gaan toe almal na Gilgal toe. Daar het hulle tydens 'n plegtigheid in die teenwoordigheid van die HERE Saul tot koning gekroon. Daarna het hulle maaltydoffers aan die HERE gebring. Saul en al die Israeliete was baie bly.

Samuel het weer met die hele Israel gepraat en gesê: “Ek het gedoen wat julle gevra het en vir julle 'n koning gegee.

“Maar toe julle vir Nagas, koning van Ammon, bang was, het julle na my toe gekom en gesê julle wil 'n koning hê om oor julle te heers alhoewel die HERE julle God reeds julle koning was. Nou goed, hier is die koning wat julle gekies het. Kyk, julle het vir hom gevra, en die ERE het julle versoek toegestaan. As julle nou die HERE dien, aanbid en na Hom luister; en as julle nie teen die HERE se voorskrifte in opstand kom nie; as julle en julle koning die HERE julle God navolg, dan sal alles met julle goed gaan. Maar as julle teen die bevel van die HERE in opstand kom en weier om Hom gehoorsaam te wees, dan sal die HERE teen julle draai soos destyds met julle voorouers.

“Staan 'n bietjie stil en aanskou die groot ding wat die HERE gaan laat gebeur. Julle weet dit reën nie hierdie tyd van die jaar wanneer die koring geoes word nie. Ek sal die HERE vra om vandag donderweer en reën te stuur. Dan sal julle besef dat julle gesondig het deur vir die HERE 'n koning te vra!”

Toe roep Samuel die HERE aan en die HERE het donderweer en reën gestuur. Almal was met ontsag gevul vir die HERE en vir Samuel.

“Bid tog tot die HERE u God ter wille van ons, anders sal ons sterf!” smeek hulle vir Samuel. “Ons het nou nog toegevoeg tot ons sondes deur vir 'n koning te vra.”

“Moenie bang wees nie,” stel Samuel hulle gerus. “Julle het gewis verkeerd gedoen, maar maak nou seker dat julle die HERE met volle toewyding aanbid en dat julle nie op enige wyse julle rug op Hom

draai nie. Moenie weer die nuttelose beelde aanbid nie. Hulle kan julle nie help of verlos nie. Hulle is totaal nutteloos! Ter wille van sy grote Naam sal die HERE nie sy volk verlaat nie. Hy het julle 'n besondere volk vir Homself gemaak. Wat my betref, ek sal sekerlik nie teen die HERE sondig deur op te hou om vir julle te bid nie. Ek sal ook voortgaan om julle te leer wat goed en reg is. Maar dien die HERE in opregtheid. Dink aan al die groot dinge wat Hy vir julle gedoen het. Maar as julle voortgaan om te sondig, sal julle en julle koning uitgewis word.”

Ná Samuel se streng waarskuwing, probeer Saul suksesvol regeer, maar dit wil voorkom asof hy altyd net een tree agter gesonde verstand is. In die aangesig van 'n oorlog misgis hy hom met hoe sterk die vyand is en besluit dan impulsief om sake in eie hande te neem terwyl hy vir Samuel wag. Watter tipe koning doen dit?

Saul was 'n kort tyd koning in Israel toe het hy vir hom 3 000 manskappe uit Israel gekies en die res huis toe gestuur het. 2 000 van hulle was by hom by Mikmas en in die heuwelagtige omgewing van Bet-El gestasioneer. Die ander 1 000 was saam met sy seun Jonatan in Gibeon in Benjamin.

Jonatan het die garnisoen Filistyne by Gibeon aangeval en verslaan. Die nuus het vinnig onder die Filistyne versprei. Saul het oor die hele land op die ramshoring laat blaas om die Hebreërs vir oorlog op te roep. Almal in Israel het gehoor dat Saul die garnisoen van die Filistyne verslaan en so hulle die onguns van die Filistyne op die hals gehaal het. Daarom is almal in Israel opgeroep om hulle agter Saul te skaar en in Gilgal saam te trek.

Die Filistyne het 'n groot mag bymekaargemaak: 3 000 oorlogswaens, 6 000 perderuiters en voetsoldate soveel as die sand aan die see. Hulle het by Mikmas, oos van Bet-Awen, kamp opgeslaan. Toe die Israeliete hierdie groot leer sien, het hulle paniekbevange geword en in gate, grotte, grafkelders, rotsskeure en droë putte probeer weggroep. Sommige het deur die Jordaanrivier gegaan en na die gebied van Gad en Gilead gevlug.

Intussen het Saul in Gilgal vertoef terwyl sy manskappe van vrees gebewe het. Soos aangespreek, het Saul sewe dae daar vir Samuel gewag, maar hy het nie opgedaag nie. Die manskappe het intussen begin dros. Toe beveel Saul: “Bring die brandoffer en die maaltydoffer hiernatoe!” Toe offer hy self die brandoffer. Net toe Saul daarmee klaar was, toe kom Samuel daar aan! Saul het hom tegemoetgegaan

om hom te groet.

Maar Samuel sê vir hom: “Wat het jy nou aangevang?”

Saul antwoord hom: “Ek het gesien hoe my manskappe dros terwyl die Filistyne by Mikmas saamgetrek het, maar u daag nie op soos ons afgespreek het nie. Toe het ek gedink: ‘Die Filistyne gaan teen my in Gilgal optrek, en ek het nog nie die HERE om hulp gevra nie!’ Ek het toe verplig gevoel om die brandoffer self te bring, aangesien u nog nie gekom het nie.”

“Dit was dwaas van jou!” sê Samuel. “Jy het nie geluister na die bevel van die HERE jou God nie. As jy geluister het, sou die HERE jou koningskap oor Israel vir altyd bevestig het. Maar nou sal jou koningskap nie voortduur nie, want die HERE het reeds ’n man na sy hart gesoek. Die HERE het hom alreeds gekies om koning oor sy volk te wees, want jy het nie die bevel van die HERE gehoorsaam nie.”

Op ’n dag sê Samuel vir Saul: “Ek het jou as koning oor Israel gesalf omdat dit die HERE se opdrag aan my was. Luister nou na die boodskap van die HERE: Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: ‘Ek het besluit om Amalek tot verantwoording te roep omdat hulle Israel teengestaan het toe hulle uit Egipte getrek het. Jy moet nou gaan en Amalek heeltemal uitroei. Doen dit sonder dat jy iemand oorsien, mans, vroue, kinders, babas, grootvee, kleinvee, kamele en donkies.’”

Saul het toe sy soldate by Telaim bymekaargeroep. Daar was 200 000 manskappe behalwe die 10 000 uit Juda.

Saul het daarna die Amalekiete verslaan van Gawila af tot by Sur, oos van Egipte. Hy het Agag, die koning van Amalek, gevange geneem, maar al die ander mense en diere totaal uitgewis. Saul en sy manskappe het Agag se lewe gespaar, asook die beste skape en beeste, die vet kalwers en lammers – trouens, alles wat hulle begeer het. Hulle het net dit wat waardeloos was, vernietig.

Saul het weer teen God gesondig. God het hom beveel om alle eiendom van die Amalekiete te vernietig, maar in plaas daarvan het Saul en sy manskappe ’n goeie deel daarvan vir hulleself gehou. Hulle het die beste diere gespaar, en Saul beweer dat hy dit as brandoffers aan die Here wou bring. Dit was steeds ongehoorsaamheid. Samuel, hartseer omdat Saul as koning gefaal het, het vir Saul gewaarsku dat sy tyd min raak. Dit was tyd om ’n opvolger te vind. Maar nadat hy al die voordele van die posisie gesmaak het, was Saul nie bereid om dit sommer net op te gee nie.

11

From Shepherd to King

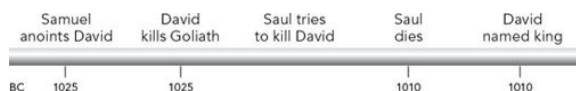
THE LORD SAID TO SAMUEL, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?”

Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.”

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”



Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.” Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.” So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

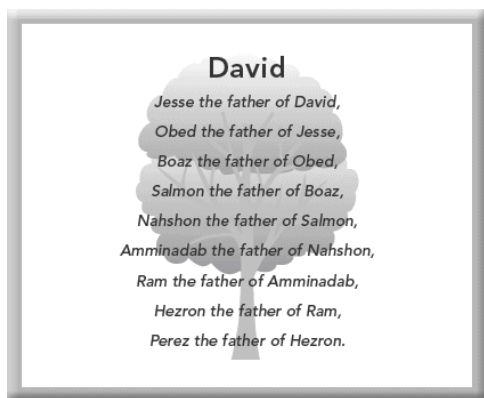
“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David.



Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Sokoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Sokoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why do you come

out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.” Then the Philistine said, “This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.” On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.

Now Jesse said to his son David, “Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.”

Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.

Now the Israelites had been saying, “Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel.”

David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him,

“This is what will be done for the man who kills him.”

When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, “Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.”

“Now what have I done?” said David. “Can’t I even speak?” He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

“I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp.

David took the Philistine’s head and brought it to Jerusalem; he put the Philistine’s weapons in his own tent.

Saul was impressed with David’s victory over Goliath. During their

post-battle interview, Saul asked David about his family and then drafted David into service at the king's court. David and Saul's son Jonathan had an instant rapport. The two young men formed a friendship of love and loyalty as strong as any brothers'. But David's popularity did not play well in the final days of Saul's reign.

As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head.

“Whose son are you, young man?” Saul asked him.

David said, “I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem.”

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well.

When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands,

and David his tens of thousands.”

Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?” And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.

The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to

himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had departed from Saul. So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

Saul was struggling to make sense of the mess he was in and becoming more paranoid and unstable as the days progressed. Many of Saul's subjects, as well as members of his own family, including Jonathan and Saul's daughter, Michal, seemed to prefer the young shepherd warrior over the unreasonable king. Consumed by anger and jealousy, on numerous occasions Saul tried to kill David, whom he perceived as his greatest internal threat.

Finally, David, in fear for his life, fled from Saul. But Saul was driven to hunt down David. He even ordered the slaughter of 85 priests who had given David shelter.

About 600 loyal men gathered around David, a militia too small to challenge Israel's army but large enough to provide an offensive force. Inside Saul's palace, Jonathan became a double agent. While Saul groomed Jonathan for kingship, Jonathan passed information to David. Jonathan recognized that David would be Israel's next leader. But this prospect seemed increasingly unlikely as Saul's army approached David's battalion in the Desert of En Gedi. In danger, David did what he always did: he poured out his fears to God and prayed for help.

Deliver me from my enemies, O God;

be my fortress against those who are attacking me.

Deliver me from evildoers

and save me from those who are after my blood.

See how they lie in wait for me!

Fierce men conspire against me

for no offense or sin of mine, LORD.

I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me.

Arise to help me; look on my plight!

You, LORD God Almighty,

you who are the God of Israel,

rouse yourself to punish all the nations;

show no mercy to wicked traitors.

You are my strength, I watch for you;

you, God, are my fortress,

my God on whom I can rely.

But I will sing of your strength,

in the morning I will sing of your love;

for you are my fortress,

my refuge in times of trouble.

You are my strength, I sing praise to you;

you, God, are my fortress,

my God on whom I can rely.

No matter how close Saul got, David consistently outmaneuvered him. David was quite accustomed to commando-type raids, but none was so daring as his encounter with Saul in a darkened cave.

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats.

He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD's anointed.' See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

"Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice,

David my son?" And he wept aloud. "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

David sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:

"The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;

my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,

my shield and the horn of my salvation.

He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior —

from violent people you save me.

"I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,

and have been saved from my enemies.

The waves of death swirled about me;

the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

The cords of the grave coiled around me;

the snares of death confronted me.

"In my distress I called to the LORD;

I called out to my God.

From his temple he heard my voice;

my cry came to his ears.

“The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!

Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior!”

The peace treaty between David and Saul (basically an agreement to not kill each other) should have settled the matter. But Saul, always unpredictable, turned on David and pursued him once again. Wisely, David retreated with his band of loyalists to Philistine territory, out of Saul's reach. How ironic that David, Israel's king-to-be, pitched his tent with the very people who waged war against his own nation and eventually took the life of his closest friend.

Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua. The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.

Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me.”

But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.

When the Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. And the Philistines came and occupied them.

The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout

the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them.

David grieved deeply over not only Jonathan's death but also Saul's. But over the course of time, God directed David to assert his calling as king. His own tribe of Judah came to Hebron to anoint him king over the house of Judah. But it wasn't until after a seven-year struggle between David and those loyal to Saul's son Ish-Bosheth that David was made king over all of Israel.

Soon afterward, David twice led the Israelites in decisive victories over the troublesome Philistines. This period also saw one of David's most important accomplishments: he defeated the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem — making it Israel's national and spiritual capital.

David was concerned about more than just military success. He loved God deeply and wanted his nation to love God too. David's passion for God led him to retrieve the ark of the covenant stored at the house of Abinadab. It was a joyous parade of people that set out to bring the ark to its new home in Jerusalem, the City of David.

David again brought together all the able young men of Israel — thirty thousand. He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark. They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.

When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act;

therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God.

Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.

David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?" He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household.

Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

David's infectious delight led him to put on quite a public display of exuberance and worship when the ark was brought into Jerusalem. Most onlookers shared David's enthusiasm. But David's wife Michal was none too happy with her uninhibited husband.

As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter

of Saul came out to meet him and said, “How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!”

David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD’s people Israel — I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor.”

And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

Aware that the treasured ark deserved a majestic home, David began to conceive of a permanent temple so awesome that people all over the world would say, “The God of the Israelites is great indeed!” David consulted with Nathan, a trusted prophet of God, about his plans. And the prophet’s reply, reflecting God’s mind on the matter, must have stunned David.

After David was settled in his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent.”

Nathan replied to David, “Whatever you have in mind, do it, for God is with you.”

But that night the word of God came to Nathan, saying:

“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought Israel up out of Egypt to this day. I have moved from one tent site to another, from one dwelling place to another. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders whom I commanded to shepherd my people, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’”

“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you

wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also subdue all your enemies.

“I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.”

Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said:

“Who am I, LORD God, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, my God, you have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. You, LORD God, have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men.

“What more can David say to you for honoring your servant? For you know your servant, LORD. For the sake of your servant and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made known all these great promises.

“There is no one like you, LORD, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. And who is like your people Israel — the one nation on earth whose God went out to redeem a people for himself, and to make a name for yourself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? You made your people Israel your very own forever, and you, LORD, have become their God.

“And now, LORD, let the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house be established forever. Do as you promised, so that it will be established and that your name will be great forever. Then people will say, ‘The LORD Almighty, the God over Israel, is Israel’s God!’ And the house of your servant David will be established before you.

“You, my God, have revealed to your servant that you will build a house for him. So your servant has found courage to pray to you. You, LORD, are God! You have promised these good things to your servant. Now you have been pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, LORD, have blessed it, and it will be blessed forever.”

A king without an army is not a king for long. David organized an effective army with trusted leadership and used it strategically to stabilize his borders and eliminate regional opposition. Mercenaries could not defeat him, and two-front battles still ended in decisive victories for him. David was a warrior, a poet and a man after God’s heart. He was a leader who put God first, who loved and followed God. Everywhere the record showed that God blessed this shepherd-king.

But David was not a perfect man. One day, with his generals gone to war, the king was confronted by an internal foe as intense as any enemy he faced on the battlefield.

Van skaapwagter tot koning

Die HERE het weer met Samuel gepraat: “Jy het nou lank genoeg oor Saul getreur vandat Ek besluit het dat hy nie langer koning van Israel moet wees nie. Maak ’n horing vol olie en gaan na Betlehem toe. Daar moet jy ’n man met die naam Isai soek. Ek het besluit dat een van sy seuns die nuwe koning sal wees.”

Samuel het gedoen wat die HERE beveel het. Toe Samuel in Betlehem aankom, was die leiers van die dorp bang. Hulle vra hom toe: “Wat is verkeerd? Kom u in vrede?”

“Ja, in vrede,” antwoord Samuel. “Ek het gekom om ’n offer aan die HERE te bring. Sorg dat julle die reinigingseremonie uitgevoer het sodat julle saam met my daaraan kan deelneem.” Hy het Isai en sy seuns self gereinig en na die geleentheid genooi.

Toe hulle daar aankom, kyk hy na Eliab en dink: “Dis sekerlik die HERE se gesalfde!”

Maar die HERE sê vir Samuel: “Moenie volgens voorkoms of grootte of liggaamsbou oordeel nie, want Ek het hom nie gekies nie. Die HERE neem nie besluite soos mense nie! Mense oordeel volgens uiterlike voorkoms, maar die HERE kyk na die binnekant.”



Toe roep Isai vir Abinadab en laat hom voor Samuel verbyloop, maar Samuel sê: “Dis ook nie die HERE se keuse nie.” Daarna roep Isai vir Samma, maar Samuel sê: “Hierdie een het die HERE ook nie gekies nie.” Sewe van Isai se seuns is so aan Samuel voorgestel, maar Samuel sê vir Isai: “Die HERE het nie een van hulle gekies nie.” Daarom vra hy: “Is hierdie al jou seuns?”

“Die jongste is nie hier nie,” antwoord Isai. “Hy pas die skape op.”

“Stuur iemand om hom te gaan haal,” sê Samuel. “Ons kan nie eet voordat hy ook hier is nie.”

Isai het so gemaak en hom laat roep. Hy was rooierig van voorkoms, aantreklik met mooi oë.

Uiteindelik sê die HERE: “Dis die regte een. Salf hom.”

Terwyl Dawid daar tussen sy broers staan, neem Samuel die olie wat hy saamgebring het en gooi dit uit op Dawid se kop. Van toe af het die Gees van die HERE kragtig in hom gewerk. Daarna het Samuel na Rama toe teruggegaan.

Dawid

Isai was die pa van Dawid,
Obed was die pa van Isai,
Boas was die pa van Obed,
Salmon was die pa van Boas,
Nagson was die pa van Salmon,
Aminadab was die pa van Nagson,
Ram was die pa van Aminadab,
Gesron was die pa van Ram,
Peres was die pa van Gesron.

Die Filistynse troepe het saamgetrek vir oorlog. Hulle het by Soko in Juda bymekaargekom en kamp opgeslaan by Efes-Dammim, tussen Soko en Aseka. Saul en die manskappe van Israel het in die vallei by die groot boom kamp opgeslaan en hulle vir die geveg teen die Filistyne gereedgemaak. Die Filistyne en die Israeliete het op twee heuwels teenoor mekaar stelling ingeneem. Daar was 'n vallei tussen hulle.

Goliath, 'n uithalervegter van Gat, het uit die leer van die Filistyne na vore gekom. Hy was drie meter lank. Hy het 'n bronshelm op sy kop gehad en 'n harnas met skubbe. Die gewig van die harnas was 57 kilogram. Sy beenplate was ook van brons, en 'n bronsswaard het tussen sy skouerblaaië gehang. Die steel van sy spies was so dik soos 'n wewer se balk en die ysterlem van die spies het sewe kilogram geweeg. 'n Wapendraer het voor hom uitgeloop en 'n skild gedra.

Hy het teenoor die manskappe van Israel gaan staan en geskreu: “Is dit regtig nodig dat die gevegslinies opgestel moet word? Ek is tog 'n Filistyn en julle is onderdane van Saul. Kies iemand wat 'n tweegeveg met my kan voer. As julle man daarin slaag om my dood te maak, sal ons julle slawe wees, maar as ek hom doodmaak, sal julle ons slawe wees! Ek daag vandag die gevegsmagte van Israel uit! Stuur tog iemand om teen my te veg!” Toe Saul en die Israeliete dit hoor,

was hulle mismoedig en baie bang.

Vir 40 dae lank, elke oggend en aand, het die Filistyn uitgekom en sy uitdaging aan die Israeliete gerig.

Op 'n dag sê Isai vir Dawid: “Wat sestien kilogram gebraaide koring en tien brode na jou broers toe in die militêrekamp. Gee hierdie tien stukke kaas vir hulle bevelvoerder. Kyk 'n bietjie hoe dit met jou broers gaan en bring iets saam om te bewys dat dit goed gaan met hulle.” Dawid se broers was manskappe in Saul se leër wat in die laagte by die groot boom teen die Filistyne geveg het.

Dawid het vroeg opgestaan, die skape in die sorg van 'n ander herder gelos, die kos geneem en gedoen soos sy pa hom beveel het. Net toe hy daar aankom, het die manskappe met 'n oorlogskreet in gevegsorde uitgetrek waar Israel en die Filistyne teenoor mekaar opgestel was. Dawid het sy bagasie net so in die sorg van 'n oppasser gelos en hom na sy broers in die linie gehaas. Daar verneem hy na hulle welstand. Juis toe kom Goliat, die uithalervegter van Gat, uit die Filistyne se linies na vore. Dawid het sy herhaalde uitdaging gehoor. Toe die Israeliete Goliat hoor, het hulle weggehardloop omdat hulle vir hom bang was.

Die manskappe van Israel sê toe: “Het julle hom gesien? Elke dag kom hy uit om Israel te beledig. Die koning het 'n groot beloning aangebied vir enigeen wat die man sal doodmaak. Die koning sal een van sy dogters vir hom as vrou gee en sy hele familie sal van belasting vrygestel word!”

Dawid praat toe met die ander wat daar by hom staan. “Wat sal gebeur met die man wat hierdie Filistyn doodmaak en so 'n einde bring aan die skande oor Israel? Wie is hierdie onbesnyde Filistyn dat hy die leër van die lewende God so kan beledig?”

Dawid het dieselfde antwoord as vroeër ontvang: “Dit is wat sal gebeur met die man wat hom doodmaak.”

Maar Dawid se oudste broer het gehoor hoe hy met die manskappe praat en het kwaad geword. “Hoekom het jy hierheen gekom?” vra hy. “En by wie het jy daardie klompie vee in die wildernis gelos? Ek ken jou domastrantheid en vermetelheid. Jy wil net die geveg sien!”

“Wat het ek dan nou gedoen?” antwoord Dawid. “Ek het maar net 'n vraag gevra!” Hy gaan toe na iemand anders toe en vra dieselfde vraag en kry dieselfde antwoord. Al meer mense het gehoor wat Dawid sê en het dit aan Saul oorgedra. Hy het Dawid laat roep.

“Ons moenie oor hierdie man moedeloos word nie,” sê Dawid vir Saul. “Ek sal teen hierdie Filistyn gaan veg!”

“Moenie verspot wees nie,” sê Saul. “Jy kan tog nie teen die Filistyn veg nie, want jy is nog maar ’n seun, terwyl hy van jongs af ’n vegter is!”

Maar Dawid het volgehou: “Ek pas my pa se skape op,” sê hy. “As ’n leeu of ’n beer kom om ’n lam uit die trop weg te dra, sit ek hom agterna. Ek val hom aan en red die lam uit sy bek. As hy my wil aanval, gryp ek hom aan sy baard en slaan hom dood. Ek het dit al met sowel ’n leeu as ’n beer gedoen, en hierdie onbesnede Filistyn sal soos een van hulle word omdat hy die leer van die lewende God beledig het! Die HERE wat my uit die kloue van die leeu en die beer gered het, sal my ook red van hierdie Filistyn!”

Saul het uiteindelik ingestem. “Goed, doen dit,” sê hy. “En mag die HERE met jou wees!”

Saul laat Dawid toe sy eie uitrusting aantrek: ’n bronshelm op sy kop en ’n borsharnas. Dawid het ook sy swaard bo-oor sy uitrusting vasgemaak. Toe hy probeer loop, kon hy nie, want hy het dit nog nie vantevore gedra nie.

“Ek kan nie hiermee loop nie,” sê hy. “Ek is nie daaraan gewoond nie.” Daarom het hy die uitrusting uitgetrek. Hy neem toe sy herderstok, soek vyf gladde klippies in die spruit uit en sit dit in sy slingersak. Met sy slingervel in die hand loop hy die Filistyn tegemoet.

Die Filistyn het na Dawid toe uitgekom, met sy skildraer voor hom. Toe hy hom sien, het hy hierdie jong rooierige en aantreklike seun geminag. Hy skreeu vir hom: “Is ek ’n hond dat jy met ’n stok na my toe kom?” Toe vervloek hy Dawid in die naam van die Filistyne se gode. “Kom nader sodat ek jou vleis vir die voëls van die hemel en die diere van die veld kan gee!” skree hy.

Maar Dawid skree terug: “Jy kom na my toe met ’n swaard en ’n spies en ’n swaard, maar ek kom na jou toe in die Naam van die HERE, die Almagtige, die God van die magte van Israel wat jy staan en beledig. Vandag gee die HERE jou oor in my mag. Ek sal jou doodmaak, jou kop afkap, en die lyke van die Filistynse leër vir die roofvoëls van die hemel en die wilde diere van die aarde gee. Die hele wêreld sal weet dat Israel ’n God het. Almal sal weet dat die HERE nie swaard en spies nodig het om sy mense te red nie. Die oorlog is die HERE s’n, en Hy sal julle in ons mag oorgee!”

Die Filistyn het al nadergekom, maar Dawid het hom vinnig tegemoetgegaan. Hy steek sy hand in sy slingersak, vat ’n klip daaruit, gooi dit met sy slingervel en tref die voorkop van die Filistyn. Die klip het in sy kop ingedring en hy het met sy gesig vooroor op die grond

geval.

So het Dawid met sy slinger en 'n klip die Filistyn oorwin. Hy het hom getref en doodgemaak sonder dat daar 'n swaard in Dawid se hande was.

Toe hardloop Dawid, trek die Filistyn se swaard uit die skede en kap sy kop daarmee af.

Toe die Filistyne sien dat hulle baasvegter dood is, het hulle gevlug. Die manskappe van Israel en Juda het opgespring en met 'n geskree die Filistyne agternagesit tot by die ingang na Gat en die poorte van Ekron. Die gesneuweldes van die Filistyne het gestrooi gelê langs die pad vanaf Saärim na Gat toe en tot by Ekron. Daarna het die Israëliete omgedraai van die agtervolging en die kamp van die Filistyne geplunder.

Dawid het die kop van die Filistyn gevat en dit na Jerusalem toe gebring, maar sy wapens in sy eie tent gaan neersit.

Saul was beïndruk met Dawid se oorwinning oor Goliat. Gedurende hulle gesprek ná die geveg, het Saul vir Dawid uitgevra oor sy familie en Dawid toe opgeroep vir diens aan die koning se hof. Dawid en Saul se seun Jonatan het dadelik goed oor die weg gekom. Die twee jong mans het 'n vriendskap gevorm van liefde en lojaliteit so sterk soos enige twee broers s'n. Maar Dawid se gewildheid het nie goed afgegaan in die laaste dae van Saul se heerskappy nie.

Nadat Dawid die Filistyn doodgemaak het, bring Abner hom na Saul toe. Die kop van die Filistyn was nog in sy hand.

Saul sê vir hom: “Sê my wie se kind is jy, my seun?”

Dawid antwoord: “Ek is die seun van u onderdaan Isai. Ons woon in Betlehem.”

Nadat Dawid met Saul gepraat het, het Saul se seun Jonatan baie geheg geraak aan Dawid. Daar was dadelik 'n band tussen hulle sodat hulle boesemvriende geword het. Daardie dag nog het Saul hom saamgeneem huis toe en wou nie toelaat dat hy na sy pa toe teruggaan nie. Jonatan en Dawid het toe 'n plegtige ooreenkoms aangegaan omdat Jonatan baie aangetrokke tot hom gevoel het. Jonatan het sy mantel uitgetrek en dit vir Dawid gegee. Hy het ook sy wapenrusting, sy swaard, sy boog en sy gordel vir hom gegee.

Dawid het toe uitgetrek teen wie ook al Saul hom uitgestuur het. Dawid het dit suksesvol uitgevoer. Daarom het Saul hom oor sy soldate aangestel. Sowel die soldate as Saul se amptenare het dit goedgekeur.

Toe hulle terugkeer huis toe ná Dawid se oorwinning oor die Filistyn, het die vroue uit al die dorpe van Israel koning Saul tegemoetgegaan. Hulle het gesing en gejubel saam met dansers met tamboeryne en met driesnarige instrumente. Die vroue het gesing en gesê:

“Saul het sy duisende verslaan,
maar Dawid sy tienduisende.”

Saul het gebrand van jaloesie, en die woorde was vir hom ’n belediging. Hy sê toe: “Aan Dawid het hulle tienduisende gegee, maar vir my net die duisende. Al wat hy nog kortkom, is die koningskap!” Van daardie dag af het Saul vir Dawid gewantrou.

Die volgende dag het ’n bose gees wat deur God gestuur is, vir Saul beetgepak sodat hy in sy huis soos ’n besetene opgetree het. Dawid het weer op die lier begin speel soos hy gewoonlik gedoen het. Saul het egter ’n spies in sy hand gehad. Toe gooi hy na Dawid met die spies en dink: “Ek sal Dawid teen die muur vaspen.” Maar Dawid het gekoes, ook vir ’n tweede keer.

Saul het bang geword vir Dawid omdat die HERE by Dawid was, maar vir hom verlaat het. Daarom het hy Dawid weggestuur en hom elders as hoof van ’n leërafdeling aangestel. Dawid was suksesvol in alles wat hy gedoen het en die HERE was met hom. Toe Saul dit opmerk, was hy bang vir hom, maar die hele Israel en Juda het van Dawid gehou omdat hy ’n suksesvolle aanvoerder was.

Saul het gesukkel om sin te maak van die gemors waarin hy was en het met verloop van tyd al meer paranoïes en onstabiel geword. Dit wou voorkom of baie van Saul se onderdane, sowel as lede van sy eie gesin, insluitend Jonatan en Saul se dogter Mikal, die jong skaapwagter-soldaat bo ’n onredelike koning verkies het. Gevul met woede en jaloesie, het Saul verskeie kere probeer om vir Dawid, wat hy as sy grootste interne bedreiging beskou het, dood te maak.

Uiteindelik het Dawid, in vrees vir sy eie lewe, van Saul af weggevlug. Maar Saul was gedryf om Dawid agterna te sit. Hy het selfs opdrag gegee dat 85 priesters, wat vir Dawid skuiling gegee het, doodgemaak word.

Ongeveer 600 lojale mans het Dawid ondersteun, ’n weermag te klein om Israel se weermag uit te daag, maar groot genoeg om ’n aanvalsmag te wees. Binne-in Saul se paleis het Jonatan ’n dubbelspioen geword. Terwyl Saul vir Jonatan voorberei het om die

troonopvolger te wees, het Jonatan vir Dawid inligting gegee. Jonatan het herken dat Dawid Israel se volgende koning sou wees. Maar hierdie vooruitsig het al hoe onwaarskynliker gelyk soos Saul se weermag Dawid se klein bataljon in die En-Gediwoestyn genader het. Met sy lewe in gevaar het Dawid gedoen wat hy altyd gedoen het: Hy het sy vrese voor die Here uitgestort en om hulp gebid.

Red my van my vyande, o God.
Laat my vyande my nie in die hande kry nie.
Bevry my van dié wat boosheid bewerk;
red my tog van dié wat bloeddorstig is.

Want kyk, hulle lê my voor.
Gedugte mense span saam teen my
al het ek nie oortree of gesondig nie, HERE.
Hoewel ek onskuldig is, bestorm hulle my, gereed vir die aanval.
Ontwaak en help my! Kyk tog wat hulle doen!
O HERE, God die Almagtige,
God van Israel,
gryp tog in en straf al die nasies.
Betoon geen genade aan bese verraaiers nie.

My sterkte, op U wag ek,
want U, o God, is my skuilplek.
My troue God sal my tegemoetkom.

Maar ek sal sing van u mag
en in die oggend jubel oor u trou.
Want U was my toevlug,
'n veilige skuiling in tye van nood.

Ek sing lofliedere vir U, my Sterkte,
want God is my skuilplek,
U is my troue God.

Maak nie saak hoe naby Saul gekom het nie, Dawid het hom elke keer ontduik. Dawid was baie gewoon aan die guerilla-tipe stropings, maar nie een van sy strooptogte was so waaghalsig as sy ontmoeting met Saul in 'n donker grot nie.

Dawid het toe in En-Gedi gaan bly. Toe Saul van die inval van die Filistyne teruggekom het, het hy gehoor dat Dawid in die

bergskuilings van En-Gedi is. Saul kom toe met drie afdelings uitgesoekte manskappe van Israel om Dawid en sy manne by die Klipbokkrans te gaan soek.

Op pad daarheen, naby skaapkrale, sien Saul 'n grot. Hy gaan toe daar in om 'n draai te loop, onwetend dat Dawid en sy manskappe agter in dieselfde grot is. “Dis nou jou kans!” fluister Dawid se manskappe. “Vandag is die dag waarvan die HERE gepraat het toe Hy gesê het: ‘Ek sal Saul sekerlik in jou mag gee sodat jy met hom kan doen wat jy wil!’” Dawid het toe stilletjies vorentoe gekruip en 'n stuk van Saul se mantel afgesny.

Maar daarna begin Dawid se gewete hom pla omdat hy 'n stuk van Saul se mantel afgesny het. “Ek het verkeerd gedoen om so teen die gesalfde van die HERE op te tree,” sê hy vir sy manne. “Ek mag nie my hand teen hom ophang nie, want hy is die HERE se gesalfde.” Dawid het sy manskappe skerp berispe en nie toegelaat dat hulle Saul aanval nie. Saul het uit die grot uitgegaan om sy agtervolging voort te sit.

Daarna kom Dawid uit die grot en roep agter hom aan: “Meneer die koning!” Toe Saul omkyk, het Dawid gekniel en diep voor hom gebuig. Hy sê vir Saul: “Hoekom luister u na mense wat sê ek wil u leed aandoen? Vandag kan u met u eie oë sien dat dit nie waar is nie. Want die HERE het u daar agter in die grot in my mag gegee. Sommige van my manskappe het gesê dat ek u moet doodmaak. Maar ek het u lewe gespaar, want ek het gedink: ‘Ek sal hom nooit leed aandoen nie, want hy is die gesalfde van die HERE.’ Kyk, Pa, wat het ek in my hand. Dis 'n stuk van u mantel! Ek het dit afgesny, maar ek het u nie doodgemaak nie. Dit bewys dat ek nie 'n kwaaddoener of 'n opstandeling is nie. Ek het nie teen u gesondig nie. Tog agtervolg u my om my dood te maak. Die HERE sal tussen ons twee oordeel. Die HERE sal wraak neem oor wat u aan my doen. Ek self sal u egter nooit kwaad aandoen nie. Dis soos die spreekwoord lui: ‘Van slegte mense kom slegte dinge.’ Ek self, egter, sal u nooit kwaad aandoen nie.

“Vir wie wil die koning van Israel nou eintlik vang? Wie is dit wat u agtervolg? 'n Dooie hond? Een enkele vlooi? Die HERE is die regter en sal tussen ons uitspraak lewer. Hy sal my saak behartig en my uit u mag bevry!”

Nadat Dawid dit gesê het, antwoord Saul: “Is dit regtig jy, my seun Dawid?” Hy het begin huil en sê vir Dawid: “Jy is 'n beter man as ek, want jy het aan my goedge doen, maar ek wou dit met kwaad vergeld. Deur my nie dood te maak nie het jy vandag bewys dat jy goed wil doen aan my. Die HERE het my in jou mag oorgelewer, maar jy het my

nie doodgemaak nie. Wie sal toelaat dat sy vyand wegkom terwyl hy hom in sy mag het? Mag die HERE jou beloon omdat jy vandag vir my goed was. Ek weet dat jy sekerlik koning sal word en dat die koningskap in Israel onder jou leiding gevestig sal word. Lê nou 'n eed af voor die HERE dat wanneer dit gebeur, jy nie my familie sal uitroei en my naam sal uitwis uit my nageslag nie.”

Dawid het toe 'n eed afgelê, en Saul is terug na sy huis toe. Maar Dawid en sy manskappe het na hulle bergskuiling toe teruggegaan.

Nadat die HERE Dawid van al sy vyande en van Saul verlos het, het hy hierdie lied tot eer van die HERE gesing. Dit is die woorde van die lied:

Die HERE is my rots, my vesting en my Redder;
my God is my rots, by wie ek skuil.
Hy is my skild, die krag van my redding,
my vesting, my toevlug, my verlosser
wat my red van geweld.

Ek sal roep tot die HERE, Hy wat lofwaardig is,
want Hy red my van my vyande.
Golwe van die dood omring my;
stromen van onheil oorweldig my.
Bande van die dood omring my,
strikke van die dood wag my in.

In my angs het ek tot die HERE geroep,
tot my God geroep om hulp.
In sy heiligdom het Hy geluister;
my hulpgeroep het Hy gehoor.

Die HERE leef! Ek prys my Rots!
Ek loof God, die rots van my redding.

Die vredesverdrag tussen Dawid en Saul (basies 'n ooreenkoms om mekaar nie dood te maak nie) was veronderstel om die situasie op te los. Maar Saul, altyd onvoorspelbaar, het teen Dawid gedraai en hom weer agternagesit. Dawid het wyslik met sy groep lojale ondersteuners na Filistynse gebied onttrek, buite Saul se bereik. Hoe ironies dat Dawid, Israel se toekomstige koning, sy tent gaan opslaan het by die mense wat oorlog gemaak het teen sy eie nasie en uiteindelik die lewe

van sy beste vriend geneem het.

Intussen het die Filistyne Israel aangeval. Die Israeliete het op die vlug geslaan. Baie van hulle het teen die hange van Gilboaberg gesneuwel. Die Filistyne het hulle op Saul en sy seuns toegespits en al drie seuns, Jonatan, Abinadab en Malkisua, doodgemaak. Die aanslag op Saul het al strawwer geword. Die boogskutters het hom ingehaal en hom ernstig gewond.

Toe beveel Saul sy wapendraer: “Vat jou swaard en steek my daarmee dood voordat hierdie onbesnede Filistyne my doodsteek en my verneder.”

Maar sy wapendraer was bang en wou dit nie doen nie. Toe vat Saul self die swaard en val daarin. Toe sy wapendraer sien dat Saul dood is, val hy ook in sy swaard en sterf saam met Saul. So is Saul en sy drie seuns, sy wapendraer en die manskappe by hom almal saam op een dag dood.

Toe die Israeliete aan die oorkant van die Jisreëllaagte en oorkant die Jordaan sien dat die leër verslaan is en Saul en sy seuns dood is, het hulle die dorpe verlaat en gevlug. Daarna het die Filistyne hierdie dorpe beset en daar gaan woon.

Die volgende dag, toe die Filistyne gaan om die lyke te plunder, kry hulle die lyke van Saul en sy drie seuns daar op Gilboaberg. Hulle het Saul se kop afgekap en sy wapenrusting afgestroop. Hulle het dit deur die hele land van die Filistyne rondgestuur om die goeie nuus te versprei en om dit in die tempel van hulle afgode en onder die mense bekend te maak. Hulle het Saul se wapenrusting in die tempel van Asarte uitgestal en sy liggaam teen die muur van Bet-San opgehang.

Toe die inwoners van Jabes in Gilead hoor wat die Filistyne aan Saul gedoen het, het hulle manskappe die hele nag deur na Bet-San toe getrek en die liggame van Saul en sy seuns van die muur afgehaal. Hulle het dit na Jabes toe gebring en dit daar verbrand.

Dawid het gerou oor Jonatan én Saul se dood. Maar met verloop van tyd het God vir Dawid opgeroep om sy roeping as koning op te neem. Sy eie stam van Juda het na Hebron gekom om hom as koning oor die huis van Juda te salf. Maar dit was eers ná 'n sewe jaar stryd tussen Dawid en die mense lojaal aan Saul se seun Isboset dat Dawid as koning oor die hele Israel gekroon is.

Kort daarna het Dawid die Israeliete twee keer in deurslaggewende oorwinnings oor die lastige Filistyne gelei. Hierdie tydperk het een van Dawid se belangrikste prestasies gesien: hy het die Jebusiete, wat in

Jerusalem gebly het, oorwin en dit Israel se nasionale en geestelike hoofstad gemaak.

Dawid was baie lief vir God en wou hê sy nasie moet God ook liefhê. Dawid se passie vir God het hom gelei om die verbondsark wat in Abinadab se huis gestaan het te gaan haal. Dit was 'n feestelike optog van mense wat uitgegaan het om die ark na sy nuwe tuiste in Jerusalem te bring.

Dawid het 30 afdelings uitgesoekte soldate bymekaargemaak. Hy en al die mense by hom het na Baäla in Juda gegaan om die ark van God te gaan haal. Dit is die ark waaroor die naam “die HERE, die Almagtige, wat oor die gerubs troon”, uitgeroep is. Hulle het die ark van God op 'n nuwe wa gelaai en dit uit die huis van Abinadab op die heuwel weggevat. Ussa en Agjo, die seuns van Abinadab, het die wa vergesel. Die ark van God was bo-op die wa, terwyl Agjo voor geloop het. Dawid en al die mense van Israel het met oorgawe voor die HERE gedans terwyl hulle sing en op allerlei musiekinstrumente gespeel het. Daar was liere, harpe, tamboeryne, ratels en simbale.

Maar toe hulle by die dorsvloer van Nakon kom, het die osse gestruikel. Ussa het sy hand uitgesteek om die ark van God te keer. Toe ontvlam die toorn van die HERE teen Ussa en tref hom sodat hy daar langs die ark van God gesterf het.

Dawid was ontsteld omdat die HERE vir Ussa so weggeskeur het. Hy noem toe die plek Peres-Ussa. Dit is nou nog die naam.

Dié dag het Dawid bang geword vir die HERE en gevra: “Hoe kan die ark van die HERE ooit na my toe kom?” Dawid was toe nie meer bereid om die ark van die HERE in die Dawidstad te laat inkom nie. Hy het dit eerder na die huis van Obed-Edom, die Gittiet geneem. Die ark van die HERE het drie maande in die huis van Obed-Edom gebly. Die HERE het hom en sy hele huis geseën.

Dis aan koning Dawid meegedeel: “Die HERE het die huis van Obed-Edom en alles wat hy besit, geseën as gevolg van die ark van God.” Dawid het toe daarheen gegaan en die ark met groot feestelikheid na die Dawidstad toe geneem. Telkens nadat die draers ses tree gegee het, het hulle gaan stilstaan sodat Dawid 'n bul en 'n vetgemaakte kalf kon offer. Dawid het met volle oorgawe voor die HERE gedans terwyl hy slegs 'n linneskouerkleed aangehad het. So het Dawid en die hele Israel die ark van die HERE met groot gejuig en geklank van die ramshoring in die stad ingebring.

Dawid se aansteeklike vreugde het hom daartoe gelei om uitbundig en

aanbiddend in die openbaar te wees toe die ark in Jerusalem ingebring is. Die meeste toeskouers was net so entoesiasies soos Dawid. Maar Dawid se vrou Mikal was nie so gelukkig met haar ongebonde man nie.

Terwyl die ark van die HERE die Dawidstad binnegekom het, het Mikal, die dogter van Saul, van bo uit haar venster toegekyk. Toe sy koning Dawid sien spring en dans voor die HERE het sy hom in haar hart verafsku.

Hulle het die ark van die HERE neergesit in 'n tent wat Dawid spesiaal daarvoor laat opslaan het. Dawid het brandoffers en maaltydoffers vir die HERE geoffer. Toe hy daarmee klaar was, het Dawid die volk geseën in die Naam van die HERE, die Almagtige. Daarna het hy aan die hele volk, vir elke man en vrou in Israel, 'n ringbrood, 'n dadelkoek en 'n bietjie rosyntjies gegee. Almal het toe huis toe gegaan.

Dawid het by sy huis gekom om sy gesin te seën. Maar Mikal, Saul se dogter, kom hom tegemoet en sê sarkasties: “Hoe eerbiedwaardig het die koning van Israel vandag opgetree! Hy het homself voor die slavinne ontbloot en soos 'n skaamtelose mens gedra!”

Dawid het teruggekap: “Ja, ek het gedans voor die HERE wat my bo jou pa en sy familie verkies het! Hy het my aangewys as heerser oor Israel, die volk van die HERE. En ek sal myself selfs nog meer verneder: Ek sal myself volgens jou siening nog geringer ag en steeds geëer word deur die slavinne van wie jy praat!”

Mikal het haar lewe lank kinderloos gebly.

Bewus daarvan dat die ark 'n majestueuse tuiste nodig het, het Dawid begin beplan aan 'n permanente tempel so fantasties dat mense van oor die hele wêreld sou sê: “Die God van Israel is werklik groot.” Dawid het vir Natan, 'n vertroude profeet van God, oor sy planne geraadpleeg. En die profeet se antwoord, wat God se gedagtes oor die idee gegee het, moes vir Dawid verbaas het.

Toe Dawid in sy paleis gevestig was en die HERE hom rus gegee het van al sy vyande om hom, het Dawid die profeet Natan ontbied. “Kyk!” sê Dawid. “Hier woon ek in 'n pragtige paleis van sederhout, maar die ark van God staan in 'n tent!”

Natan het die koning geantwoord: “Doen gerus wat u in gedagte het, want die HERE is met u.”

Maar daardie selfde nag het die HERE vir Natan gesê:

“Gaan sê vir my dienaar Dawid: ‘Dit is wat die HERE sê: Wil jy vir My ’n huis bou om in te woon? Vandat Ek die Israëliete uit Egipte gelei het tot nou toe het Ek nog nooit in ’n huis gewoon nie. My huis was ’n tentwoning wat van plek tot plek verskuif het. Ek het al die tyd saam met Israel getrek. Ek het nooit enigeen van die leiers wat Ek beveel het om die volk Israel te lei, gevra: Hoekom bou julle nie vir My ’n huis van sederhout nie?’

“Gaan en sê nou vir my dienaar Dawid: ‘Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: Ek het jou uit die weiveld, van agter die skape weggevat om oor my volk Israel te kom heers. Ek was by jou oral waar jy gegaan het en Ek het al jou vyande vernietig. Ek het jou naam beroemd gemaak oor die hele aarde. Ek het my volk Israel ’n vaste woonplek gegee, en hulle daar gevestig. Dit is ’n veilige plek waar hulle nie weer gesteur sal word nie. Bose mense sal hulle nie onderdruk soos in die verlede, in die tyd toe Ek rigters aangestel het om oor my volk te heers nie. Ek sal jou rus gee van al jou vyande.

“Nou verklaar die HERE dat Hy vir jou ’n koningshuis sal bou. Wanneer jy sterf en by jou voorouers begrawe word, sal Ek een uit jou nageslag, jou eie seun, in jou plek koning maak en Ek sal sy koninkryk vas laat staan. Hy sal tot eer van my Naam ’n huis bou en Ek sal sy troon bevestig vir altyd. Ek sal vir hom soos ’n vader wees, en hy sal vir My ’n seun wees. As hy oortree, sal Ek hom bestraf deur mense en menslike middels. Maar my troue liefde sal Ek nie van hom af wegneem soos Ek dit tot jou voordeel van Saul af weggeneem het nie. Jou koningshuis en jou koninkryk sal vir altyd vasstaan en jou troon sal vir altyd voortbestaan.”

Natan het toe na Dawid toe teruggegaan en hom alles vertel wat die HERE gesê het.

Toe het koning Dawid ingegaan en voor die HERE gaan sit en gebid:

“Wie is ek, oppermagtige HERE, en wie is my nageslag dat U so baie vir my gedoen het? En selfs dit was vir U nog nie genoeg nie, oppermagtige HERE, want U het ook gepraat van ’n toekomstige koningshuis vir u dienaar! Wat ’n belofte aan ’n mens, oppermagtige HERE!

“Wat meer kan ek sê? U ken my, u dienaar, oppermagtige HERE. Ter wille van u dienaar en volgens u wil het U hierdie groot ding gedoen en dit vir my, u dienaar, bekendgemaak.

“Daarom is U groot, oppermagtige HERE! Daar is niemand soos U nie. Ons het nog nooit gehoor van enige God soos U nie. En watter

ander volk is soos Israel? Dis die een nasie op aarde wat U, God, uit slawerny verlos het en U eie volk gemaak het. U het 'n groot naam vir Uself gemaak toe U u volk uit Egipte gered het en met groot ontsagwekkende daade die nasies en gode wat in hulle pad gestaan het, uitgedryf het. U het Israel tot u volk gemaak vir altyd, en U, HERE, het hulle God geword.

“En nou, HERE God, doen wat U belowe het oor my en my nageslag en bevestig dit vir altyd sodat u Naam vir altyd geëer mag word. Mag daar gesê word: ‘Die HERE, die Almagtige, is God van Israel!’ En mag die koningshuis van u dienaar Dawid in u teenwoordigheid vas bly staan.

“HERE, Almagtige, God van Israel, ek het die vrymoedigheid geneem om hierdie gebed tot U te bid, want U het bekendgemaak dat U 'n huis vir my sal bou! Nou, oppermagtige HERE, U is God en u woorde is waarheid. U het hierdie goeie dinge aan u dienaar belowe. Mag U nou asseblief die huis van u dienaar seën sodat dit vir altyd voor U mag bestaan, want U, oppermagtige HERE, het dit belowe. Met u seën sal die koningshuis van u dienaar vir altyd geseën wees!”

’n Koning sonder ’n weermag is nie vir lank ’n koning nie. Dawid het ’n doeltreffende weermag georganiseer met vertroude leiers, en het dit strategies gebruik om sy grense te stabiliseer en die streeksopposisie te elimineer. Huursoldate kon hom nie oorwin nie, en hy het in oorloë op twee fronte steeds beslissende oorwinnings behaal. Dawid was ’n soldaat, ’n digter en ’n man na God se hart. Hy was ’n leier wat God eerste gestel het, wat God liefgehad en gevolg het. Oral in die rekords is dit duidelik dat God die skaapwagter-koning geseën het.

Maar Dawid was nie volmaak nie. Eendag, terwyl sy generaal gaan oorlog voer het, is die koning gekonfronteer deur ’n innerlike vyand net so intens soos enige vyand wat hy op die oorlogsfront moes aandurf.

12

The Trials of a King

IN THE SPRING, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained

in Jerusalem.

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”

So David sent this word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house.



David was told, “Uriah did not go home.” So he asked Uriah, “Haven’t you just come from a military campaign? Why didn’t you go home?”

Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!”

Then David said to him, “Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, “Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.”

So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place

where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

"Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’”

Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

Unlike Saul, David didn't make excuses for his sin. Humbled and broken in heart, David acknowledged his sin and poured out his feelings in this prayer.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;

according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions. [1](#)

Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;

so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness;

let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit [2](#) from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

The king was humbled by the same sexual weakness known to many men. But unlike many men, David understood that his sin had broken a relationship with God. He had disappointed God by his greed, lust and murder. David's sin was a breach in a divine friendship that needed repairing. His repentance was real, but there were still consequences for his actions.

Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the LORD, the son born to you will die."

After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.

On the seventh day the child died. David's attendants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, he wouldn't listen to us when we spoke to him. How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate."

David noticed that his attendants were whispering among themselves, and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked.

“Yes,” they replied, “he is dead.”

Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped.

Forgiveness cleanses the wounds of sin. David, filled with remorse, asked God to forgive him, and God said yes. God values the person who respects his holiness and treasures his friendship. David expressed his gratitude for God's gift of forgiveness in one of his psalms.

Blessed is the one
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the one
whose sin the LORD does not count against them
and in whose spirit is no deceit.

When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

For day and night
your hand was heavy on me;

my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you
and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, “I will confess
my transgressions to the LORD.”

And you forgave
the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let all the faithful pray to you

while you may be found;

surely the rising of the mighty waters
will not reach them.

You are my hiding place;
you will protect me from trouble
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

Many are the woes of the wicked,
but the LORD's unfailing love
surrounds the one who trusts in him.

Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
sing, all you who are upright in heart!

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah. ³

His sin forgiven, David again praised God with a full heart and continued to lead the army with great success. This brilliant strategist knew how to motivate men. Among his own sons, however, a struggle was brewing that David did not see coming. With respect to his son Absalom especially, David's normally deep insight into human behavior failed him. David failed to act as Absalom subtly undermined his father's administration and courted the populace. Finally, Absalom challenged David's political position. This beautiful man, with an untamed spark that David must have recognized, became a traitor.

David now faced uncharted territory—a rebellion from within his own family, an enemy who was also a beloved son. How do you march against a foe you love? How do you throw a spear into the heart of another, when the thrust crushes your own heart as well?

David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. David sent out his troops, a third under the command of Joab, a third under

Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, "I myself will surely march out with you."

But the men said, "You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city."

The king answered, "I will do whatever seems best to you."

So the king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands. The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. There Israel's troops were routed by David's men, and the casualties that day were great — twenty thousand men. The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.

Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

When one of the men saw what had happened, he told Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree."

Joab said to the man who had told him this, "What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt."

But the man replied, "Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.' And if I had put my life in jeopardy —and nothing is hidden from the king — you would have kept your distance from me."

Joab said, "I'm not going to wait like this for you." So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. And ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes.

During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King's Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, "I have no son to carry on the memory of my name." He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day.

Then Joab said to a Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.

Then the Cushite arrived and said, "My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you."

The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?"

The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man."

The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you — O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The king covered his face and cried aloud, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Absalom's rebellion was suppressed and the political damage repaired. Now David turned his attention to more pleasant concerns. The word of the Lord had come to David that the temple project would fall to his successor, Solomon. David planned big and gathered

lavish materials, but Solomon would later manage the construction itself. David's work was nearly done. A time of transition was coming. Would the future be as God-blessed as the past?

Then David said, "The house of the LORD God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel."

So David gave orders to assemble the foreigners residing in Israel, and from among them he appointed stonecutters to prepare dressed stone for building the house of God. He provided a large amount of iron to make nails for the doors of the gateways and for the fittings, and more bronze than could be weighed. He also provided more cedar logs than could be counted, for the Sidonians and Tyrians had brought large numbers of them to David.

David said, "My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it." So David made extensive preparations before his death.

Then he called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. David said to Solomon: "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. But this word of the LORD came to me: 'You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, ⁴ and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.'

"Now, my son, the LORD be with you, and may you have success and build the house of the LORD your God, as he said you would. May the LORD give you discretion and understanding when he puts you in command over Israel, so that you may keep the law of the LORD your God. Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the LORD gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged.

“I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the LORD a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them. You have many workers: stonecutters, masons and carpenters, as well as those skilled in every kind of work in gold and silver, bronze and iron — craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the LORD be with you.”

Then David ordered all the leaders of Israel to help his son Solomon. He said to them, “Is not the LORD your God with you? And has he not granted you rest on every side? For he has given the inhabitants of the land into my hands, and the land is subject to the LORD and to his people. Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the LORD your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that you may bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the sacred articles belonging to God into the temple that will be built for the Name of the LORD.”

Then King David said to the whole assembly: “My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God. With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God — gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble — all of these in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate themselves to the LORD today?”

Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king’s work gave willingly. They gave toward the work on the temple of God five thousand talents and ten thousand darics of gold, ten thousand talents of silver, eighteen thousand talents of bronze and a hundred thousand talents of iron. Anyone who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the temple of the LORD

in the custody of Jehiel the Gershonite. The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly.

David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,

“Praise be to you, LORD,

the God of our father Israel,

from everlasting to everlasting.

Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power

and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,

for everything in heaven and earth is yours.

Yours, LORD, is the kingdom;

you are exalted as head over all.

Wealth and honor come from you;

you are the ruler of all things.

In your hands are strength and power

to exalt and give strength to all.

Now, our God, we give you thanks,

and praise your glorious name.

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you. I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things

I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. LORD, the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep these desires and thoughts in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you. And give my son Solomon the wholehearted devotion to keep your commands, statutes and decrees and to do everything to build the palatial structure for which I have provided.”

Then David said to the whole assembly, “Praise the LORD your God.” So they all praised the LORD, the God of their fathers; they bowed down, prostrating themselves before the LORD and the

king.

What formed the center of this leader’s intriguing personality? Was it power and avarice, the normal style of kings? No. It was love of God. David was a man full of drive and passion, his wealth was secure, and his family was as large as a small village. But what ruled his life and consumed his heart was a deep love for God. Take the rest away, and God remained. God was the generous Giver and loving Father who led David from childhood to old age. David’s poetry paints a beautiful picture of his relationship with his God — a protector, Father and Lord.

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths,
for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

David knew his days as a warrior were over and his energy to lead a nation was waning. Still he resisted transferring power to his son Solomon. One day his lovely wife Bathsheba whispered in his ear: "Now, David, now is the time." And the king complied.

1Transgression(s): Offense against God; synonymous with *sin*.

2Holy Spirit: The manifestation of God who dwells within those who believe in Jesus Christ and empowers them to follow God's way. God is one God but acts in three "persons" of God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit.

3Jedidiah: *Jedidiah* means "loved by the Lord."

4Solomon: *Solomon* sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for "peace."

Die beproewings van 'n koning

Die volgende lente, die tyd waarin die konings gewoonlik gaan veg, het Dawid vir Joab en sy manskappe, asook die hele leër van Israel gestuur. Hulle het die Ammoniete verslaan en Rabba gaan beleër. Dawid het in Jerusalem agtergebly.

Een namiddag, nadat hy gerus het, het Dawid opgestaan en op die dak van die paleis rondgeeloop. Van die dak af sien hy 'n besonder mooi vrou wat besig was om te bad. Hy stuur toe iemand om uit te vind wie sy is. “Dis Batseba, die dogter van Eliam en vrou van Urija die Hetiet,” verneem hy. Dawid het haar laat haal. Sy het so pas die reinigingsrituele na haar maandstonde voltooi. Sy het na die paleis toe gekom en hy het by haar geslaap. Daarna het sy teruggegaan na haar huis toe. Toe sy later agterkom dat sy ver wag, stuur sy vir Dawid 'n boodskap: “Ek is swanger.”

Dawid het vir Joab laat weet: “Stuur Urija die Hetiet na my toe.” Joab het so gemaak. Toe Urija by Dawid kom, vra hy hoe dit met Joab en die leër gaan en hoe die oorlog verloop. Toe sê hy vir Urija: “Gaan gerus huis toe en rus 'n bietjie.” Dawid het selfs 'n geskenk agter Urija aan gestuur nadat hy die paleis verlaat het. Maar Urija wou nie huis toe gaan nie. Hy het die nag by die ingang van die paleis geslaap by die slawe van die koning.



Dawid het gehoor dat Urija nie huis toe gegaan het nie. Hy vra toe vir Urija: “Wat is verkeerd met jou? Hoekom het jy nie laas nag huis toe gegaan nadat jy so lank weg was nie?”

Urija antwoord: “Die ark en die leër van Israel en Juda oornag in tente, en Joab en u manskappe kampeer in die oop veld. Hoe kan ek dan huis toe gaan om te eet en te drink en by my vrou te slaap? So waar as u leef, ek sal nie so iets doen nie.”

“Bly vannag nog hier,” sê Dawid vir hom. “Môre stuur ek jou

terug.” Urija het toe daardie dag en die volgende dag in Jerusalem gebly. Dawid nooi hom toe om saam met hom te kom eet en drink. Hy het hom dronk gemaak, maar selfs toe het hy nog nie huis toe gegaan nie, maar weer by die ingang van die paleis by die koning se slawe geslaap.

Die volgende oggend skryf Dawid ’n brief aan Joab en stuur dit saam met Urija. Die brief het gelui: “Plaas Urija op die voorpunt waar die geveg op sy hewigste is. Val dan terug sodat hy kan sneuwel.”

Joab was besig om die stad te beleër. Hy het vir Urija op ’n plek gesit waar hy geweet het die stryd is vel. Die verdedigers het uitgekóm om teen Joab te veg. Verskeie van Dawid se soldate het gesneeuwel, ook Urija die Hetiet.

Toe Batseba hoor dat haar man dood is, het sy oor hom gerou. Toe die routyd verby was, het Dawid haar na sy paleis toe laat haal en sy het een van Dawid se vroue geword. Sy het geboorte gegee aan ’n seuntjie. Maar die HERE was baie ontevrede met dit wat Dawid gedoen het.

Die HERE het toe die profeet Natan na Dawid toe gestuur. Hy het by Dawid gekom en vir hom vertel: “In ’n bepaalde dorpie was daar twee mans. Die een was ryk en die ander arm. Die ryk man het troppe kleinvee en beeste besit. Die arm man het niks besit nie behalwe ’n klein oilammetjie wat hy gekoop het. Hy het haar versorg en saam met sy kinders grootgemaak. Sy het van die oorskietkos geëet, uit sy beker gedrink en op sy skoot gelê. Sy was vir hom soos ’n dogter.

“Op ’n dag kom daar ’n besoeker by die huis van die ryk man aan. Hy wou nie ’n skaap uit sy eie kudde vang en as kos voorberei nie. Toe neem hy die arm man se oilam, slag dit en berei dit voor vir die gas.”

Dawid was woedend. “So seker as wat die HERE leef,” sê hy vir Natan, “die man wat dit gedoen het, verdien die dood! Hy moet met vier lammers vergoed vir die oilam wat hy gevat het en ook omdat hy geen medelye gehad het nie.”

Toe antwoord Natan vir Dawid: “Jy is daardie man! Die HERE, die God van Israel, sê: ‘Ek het jou tot koning van Israel gesalf en jou uit die mag van Saul gered. Ek het sy huis vir jou gegee, asook sy vroue en die koninkryke van Israel en Juda. En, as dit nie genoeg was nie, sou Ek jou nog baie meer gegee het. Hoekom het jy dan die woord van die HERE geminag en hierdie verskriklike ding gedoen? Jy het Urija die Hetiet met die swaard laat vermoor en sy vrou gevat. Jy het hom deur die swaard van die Ammoniete doodgemaak! Van nou af sal die

swaard 'n permanente bedreiging vir jou familie inhou omdat jy My verag het en Urija se vrou vir jouself toegeëien het.

“Omdat jy dit gedoen het, sal Ek, die HERE, toesien dat jou eie huis ellende oor jou bring. Ek sal jou vroue voor jou oë vir 'n ander man gee, en hy sal oop en bloot, in die helder daglig, by hulle gaan slaap. Jy het dit in die geheim gedoen, maar Ek sal dit openlik voor die hele Israel doen.”

Toe bely Dawid sy skuld en sê vir Natan: “Ek het teen die HERE gesondig.”

Anders as Saul het Dawid nie verskonings gesoek vir sy sonde nie. Dawid het nederig en met 'n gebroke hart sy sonde erken en sy gevoelens in 'n gebed voor die Here uitgestort.

Wees my genadig, o God,
volgens u troue liefde.
Wis tog my sonde uit,
op grond van u barmhartigheid.

Was my skoon van my skuld.
Reinig my van my sonde.

Want ek ken my oortredings
en my sonde is gedurig voor my.
Teen U, U alleen, het ek gesondig;
ek het gedoen wat vir U verkeerd is.
Daarom is u uitspraak reg
en u oordeel regverdig.
Want ek is as sondaar gebore,
en was dit toe my ma swanger geword het.
Maar U verwag waarheid in die hart.
U leer my om wysheid te besit.

Neem weg my sonde met hisop sodat ek skoon kan wees,
was my dat ek witter as sneeu kan wees.
Gee my tog weer blydschap en vreugde;
U het my stukkend gebreek, laat my weer vol vreugde wees.
Moenie let op my sondes nie,
en wis al my oortredings uit.

Skep vir my 'n rein hart, o God.

Gee my 'n nuwe, standvastige gees.
Moenie my verban wég van u teenwoordigheid nie,
en moenie u Heilige Gees van my af wegneem nie.
Gee my tog weer die vreugde van u redding
en maak my gewillig om U te gehoorsaam.

Die koning is nederig gemaak deur dieselfde seksuele swakhede wat baie mans ken. Maar anders as baie mans het Dawid verstaan dat sy sonde sy verhouding met God vertroebel het. Hy het God teleurgestel deur sy hebsug, wellus en moord. Dawid se sonde het 'n goddelike vriendskap verbreek wat herstel moes word. Sy berou was eg, maar daar was steeds gevolge vir sy dade.

Natan antwoord hom: “Die HERE het jou sonde vergewe sodat jy nie oor hierdie sonde sal sterf nie. Maar jy het vir die vyande van die HERE geleentheid gegee om Hom te laster. Daarom sal hierdie kind sterf.”

Nadat Natan daar weg is, het die HERE die kind van Urija se vrou en Dawid dodelik siek laat word. Dawid het die HERE gesmeek om die kind se lewe te spaar. Hy het gevas, en die hele nag op die vloer gelê. Die oudstes van sy huishouding het by hom gepleit om op te staan, maar hy het geweier en wou nie saam met hulle eet nie.

Op die sewende dag het die kind gesterf. Dawid se amptenare was bang om dit vir hom te vertel. “Toe die kind nog gelewe het, het ons met die koning gepraat, maar hy wou nie vir ons luister nie,” het hulle gesê. “Watter onverantwoordelike ding sal hy dalk doen as ons hom vertel dat die kind dood is?”

Dawid het opgemerk dat hulle onder mekaar fluister en hy het besef dat die kind gesterf het. “Is die kind dood?” vra hy.

“Ja, hy is dood,” antwoord hulle.

Toe het Dawid van die grond af opgestaan, homself gewas en reukolie aangesmeer. Nadat hy skoon klere aangetrek het, het hy in die heiligdom ingegaan en daar aanbid.

Vergifnis maak die wonde van sonde skoon. Dawid was vol berou en het God gevra om hom te vergewe. God het ja gesê. God waardeer die persoon wat sy heiligheid respekteer en sy vriendskap koester. Dawid het sy dankbaarheid vir God se gawe van vergifnis in een van sy psalms uitgedruk.

Geseënd is die mens
wie se opstand vergewe is,

wie se oortredings afgeskryf is.
Geseënd is die mens
wie se sonde die HERE nie toereken nie,
in wie se lewe daar geen bedrog is nie!

Toe ek oor my sonde stilgebly het,
het my liggaam gekwyn van ellende,
het ek die hele dag lank gekreun.
Dag en nag
was u hand swaar op my.
My krag het verdwyn
soos water in somerhitte.

Maar ek het my oortredings bely,
my sonde nie weggesteek nie.
Ek het gesê: “Ek bely
my opstand teen die HERE.”
En my sonde en oortredings
het U vergewe.

Daarom moet al die vromes U aanbid
in tye van nood.
Die groot vloedwaters
sal dié mens beslis nie oorval nie.
U is vir my ’n skuilplek.
U beskerm my van teëspoed.
U omring my met liedere van redding.

Baie leed tref die goddeloses,
maar onfeilbare liefde
omring hulle wat op die HERE vertrou.

Daarom, wees bly in die HERE en juig, regverdiges!
Roep uit van vreugde, julle almal wat opreg is!

Dawid het toe vir Batseba sy vrou getroos en by haar geslaap. Sy het ’n seun in die wêreld gebring. Dawid het hom Salomo genoem. Die HERE het die seun liefgehad en het deur die profeet Natan laat weet dat sy naam Jedidja, geliefde van die HERE, moes wees, want die HERE het hom liefgehad.

Met sy sonde vergewe het Dawid weer vir God geprys met ’n

toegewyde hart en voortgegaan om die weermag met groot sukses te lei. Hierdie briljante strateeg het geweet hoe om manne te motiveer. Onder sy eie seuns het daar egter 'n stryd begin broei wat Dawid nie sien kom het nie. Veral ten opsigte van sy seun Absalom het Dawid se gewoonlik diep insig in menslike gedrag hom gefaal. Dawid het nie opgetree toe Absalom sy pa se administrasie subtiel ondermyn het en die volk agter hom geskaar het nie. Uiteindelik het Absalom Dawid se politieke posisie uitgedaag. Hierdie pragtige man, met 'n ongetemde vonk wat Dawid moes herken het, het 'n verraaier geword.

Dawid het nou voor onbekende terrein te staan gekom, naamlik 'n rebellie binne sy eie gesin, 'n vyand wat ook 'n geliefde seun was. Hoe trek jy op teen 'n vyand vir wie jy lief is? Hoe gooi jy 'n spies in die hart van iemand anders wanneer dit ook jou eie hart sal verwoes?

Dawid het die leër wat by hom was, slag gereed gekry en hoofde oor honderd en oor duisend aangewys. Een derde het hy onder Joab se bevel geplaas, een derde onder Joab se broer Abisai, en een derde onder Ittai die Gattiet. Toe sê die koning vir hulle: “Ek sal ook saam met julle uittrek.”

Maar die soldate het sterk beswaar gemaak. “Nee! U moenie saamgaan nie,” sê hulle. “As ons moet vlug, sal niemand hulle aan ons steur nie; selfs as die helfte van ons doodgaan, sal niemand ag slaan op ons nie. Maar u is soos 10 000 van ons. Dit sal beter wees as u ons liewer van die stad se kant af kom help as dit nodig is.”

“Ek sal maak soos julle sê,” stem die koning in.

Hy het by die stadspoort gaan staan terwyl die soldate in afdelings van honderd en duisend by hom verbygegaan het. Die koning het vir Joab, Abisai en Ittai beveel: “Julle moet om my ontwil mooi werk met die jong man Absalom.” Al die soldate het gehoor watter opdrag die koning aan sy bevelvoerders gegee het.

Die leër het op die vlakte teen Israel opgetrek. Die geveg het tot in die Efraimsbos uitgebrei. Dawid se leër het die magte van Israel verslaan. Daar was 'n groot slagting en 20 000 soldate het daardie dag gesneuwel. Die gevegte het oor die hele gebied uitgebrei. Meer mense het as gevolg van die bos omgekom as wat deur die swaard gesneuwel het.

Dawid se manne het op Absalom afgekom. Hy het op 'n muil gery. Die muil het onder die digte takke van 'n groot boom deurgegaan waar Absalom se kop tussen die takke vasgevang is. Sy muil het onder hom uitgehardloop sodat hy tussen hemel en aarde bly hang het.

Iemand het gesien wat gebeur het en vir Joab gaan vertel: “Weet u,

ek het Absalom gesien waar hy aan 'n boom hang!”

“Wat?” sê Joab. “Jy het hom gesien en hom nie eers doodgemaak nie? Ek sou jou dan met tien silwerstukke en 'n gordel beloon het!”

“Selfs al sou 1 000 silwerstukke in my hand afgeweeg word, sou ek nie my hand teen die koning se seun gelig het nie,” sê die man. “Ons het tog almal gehoor hoe die koning vir u en Abisai en Ittai beveel: ‘Wees ter wille van my versigtig met die jong man Absalom.’ As ek verraad teen my koning sou pleeg deur sy seun dood te maak, sal die koning dit uitvind en u sou nie vir my intree nie.”

“Dis nou genoeg van jou praatjies,” sê Joab. Hy vat toe drie spiese en steek dit deur Absalom se hart terwyl hy nog lewendig tussen hemel en aarde aan die boom hang. Tien van Joab se wapendraers het Absalom omsingel, hom aangeval en afgemaai.

Daarna het Joab op die ramshoring laat blaas en sy soldate het opgehou om die leër van Israel te agtervolg. Hulle het Absalom se liggaam in 'n diep gat in die bos gegooi en 'n groot hoop klippe daarop gestapel. Die hele Israel het egter na hulle huise toe gevlug.

Terwyl hy nog gelewe het, het Absalom vir homself 'n gedenkteken in die Koningslaagte opgerig, want hy het gesê: “Ek het tog nie 'n seun wat my naam in gedagtenis kan hou nie.” Hy het die gedenkteken na homself vernoem en dit staan vandag nog bekend as “Absalom se Gedenkteken”.

Toe sê Joab vir 'n Kussiet: “Gaan vertel vir die koning wat jy gesien het.” Die man het voor Joab gebuig en begin hardloop.

Toe kom die Kussiet daar aan en hy sê: “Ek het nuus vir my heer die koning. Vandag het die HERE u verlos van almal wat teen u in opstand gekom het.”

“Is die jong man Absalom veilig?” vra die koning.

Die Kussiet het geantwoord: “Mag dit met al u vyande en met almal wat met bose planne teen u in opstand kom, gaan soos met daardie jong man.”

Die koning was oorstelp van droefheid. Hy het in trane uitgebars en opgegaan na sy kamer bokant die poort. So ver as wat hy loop, het hy geroep: “My seun Absalom! My seun, my seun Absalom! As ek maar in jou plek kon sterf! Absalom, my seun, my seun!”

Die koning het sy gesig toegemaak en hard geroep: “My seun Absalom! Absalom, my seun, my seun!”

Absalom se rebellie is onderdruk en die politieke skade herstel. Dawid se aandag het verskuif na aangenamer sake. Die woord van die HERE het tot Dawid gekom dat sy seun Salomo verantwoordelik sou wees vir die bou van die tempel. Dawid het groot planne gehad en het al die materiaal bymekaargemaak, maar Salomo sou later self die konstruksie hanteer. Dawid se werk was amper afgehandel. Daar was 'n tyd van verandering op pad. Sou die toekoms net so God-geseënd wees as die verlede?

Dawid het gesê: “Hier is die plek vir die huis van die HERE God en die plek vir die altaar vir Israel se brandoffers!”

Dawid het beveel dat al die vreemdelinge wat in Israel leef, bymekaar moet kom. Hy het hulle aangestel om die blokke klip reg te kap om die tempel van God mee te bou. Dawid het ook groot hoeveelhede yster verskaf vir die spykers wat nodig sou wees vir die poortdeure en vir kramme, en koper wat soveel was dat dit nie geweeg kon word nie. Daarby het hy ontelbaar baie sederblokke verskaf, want die mense van Sidon en Tirus het vir Dawid groot hoeveelhede sederhout gebring.

Want Dawid het gesê: “My seun Salomo is nog jonk en onervare, en die huis wat vir die HERE gebou gaan word, moet indrukwekkend en groot wees, 'n roem en 'n sieraad vir alle lande. Daarom tref ek vir hom die voorbereidings.” Daarom het Dawid voor sy dood al groot hoeveelhede boumateriaal bymekaargemaak.

Daarna het Dawid sy seun Salomo laat haal en vir hom verduidelik dat hy 'n tempel vir die HERE, die God van Israel, moes bou. “Ek wou 'n tempel tot eer van die HERE my God bou,” het Dawid vir hom gesê. “Maar die HERE het vir my gesê: ‘Jy het baie mense doodgemaak in die groot oorloë waarin jy geveg het. Omdat jy so baie bloed voor My op die grond vergiet het, is jy nie die een wat 'n tempel tot my eer sal bou nie. Maar jy sal 'n seun hê wat vrede en rus in sy tyd sal beleef. Ek sal hom vrede met sy vyande en al die omliggende lande gee. Sy naam sal Salomo¹ wees, en Ek sal vrede en rus in Israel gedurende sy regering gee. Hy is die een wat 'n tempel tot my eer sal bou. Hy sal my seun wees, en Ek sal sy Vader wees. Ek sal die troon van sy koningskap oor Israel vir altyd bevestig.’

“Nou, my seun, mag die HERE met jou wees en jou suksesvol maak terwyl jy die instruksies volg wanneer jy die tempel van die HERE jou God bou. Mag die HERE jou ook wysheid en begrip gee sodat jy die opdragte van die HERE jou God sal gehoorsaam terwyl jy oor Israel regeer. Want as jy sorgvuldig al die opdragte en bepalings uitvoer wat

die HERE deur Moses vir Israel gegee het, sal jy suksesvol wees. Daarom, wees sterk en vol moed. Moenie bang of moedeloos word nie.

“Ek het hard gewerk om materiaal vir die bou van die tempel van die HERE te verskaf – byna drie en ’n half ton goud en 34 000 ton silwer, en soveel yster en koper dat dit nie geweeg kan word nie. Ek het ook hout en klip bymekaargemaak, alhoewel jy meer nodig kan kry. Jy het baie vaardige klipkappers, ambagsmanne in klip en hout, en kunstenaars van elke soort. Hulle is vaardige goudsmede, silwersmede en bewerkers van koper en die yster. Begin nou met die werk, en mag die HERE met jou wees!”

Dawid het al die leiers in Israel beveel om sy seun Salomo by te staan. “Die HERE julle God is met julle,” het hy verklaar. “Hy het julle rus gegee van die omringende volke. Hy het al die inwoners van die land aan my oorgegee, en hulle is nou onderdane van die HERE en sy volk. Soek nou die HERE julle God met julle hele hart. Bou die heiligdom van die HERE God sodat julle die verbondsark van die HERE en die heilige voorwerpe van God in die tempel kan bring om die HERE te eer.”

Koning Dawid het toe na die hele vergadering gedraai en vir hulle gesê: “My seun Salomo, wat God as die volgende koning verkies het, is nog maar jonk en onervare. Die werk wat vir hom wag, is groot. Want die tempel wat hy bou, is nie maar net nog ’n gebou nie. Dit is vir die HERE God self! Ek het elke hulpbron tot my beskikking gebruik en soveel as wat ek kon, bymekaargemaak om die tempel van my God te bou. Daarom is daar nou genoeg goud, silwer, koper, yster en hout, sowel as groot hoeveelhede oniksstene, ander kosbare stene, duur juwele en allerhande stene en marmerstene. Omdat die tempel van my God my na aan die hart lê, gee ek al my persoonlike skatte van goud en silwer om met die konstruksie daarvan te help. Dit is buiten die boumateriaal wat ek reeds bymekaargemaak het vir sy heilige tempel. Ek gee nou meer as 102 ton goud van Ofir en meer as 238 ton gesuiwerde silwer om die mure van die geboue oor te trek en vir die ander werk van goud en silwer wat die ambagsmanne moet maak. Wie gaan my voorbeeld volg? Wie is gewillig om vandag geskenke vir die HERE te bring?”

Toe het die familieleiers, die stamleiers van Israel, die generaals en kapteins van die leer en die koning se administratiewe personeel gewillig bygedra. Vir die oprigting van die tempel van God het hulle gegee: byna 170 ton goud, 10 000 goue muntstukke, 340 ton silwer, 612 ton koper en 3 400 ton yster. Onder toesig van Jegiël, ’n

afstammeling van Gerson, het hulle ook talle edelgesteentes bygedra vir die skatkamers van die huis van die HERE. Die volk het gejuig oor die vrywillige gawes, want hulle het vrywillig en heelhartig bygedra vir die HERE. Koning Dawid was ook vol vreugde.

Dawid het die HERE geprys waar die hele vergadering teenwoordig was:

“O HERE, God van ons voorouer Israel,
mag U vir altyd geloof word!
Aan U, HERE, behoort die grootheid
en heerlikheid, mag, roem en majesteit.
Alles in die hemel en op die aarde
behoort aan U, HERE.
Aan U behoort die koninkryk.
U is verhewe bo alles.
Rykdom en eer kom van U alleen,
want U heers oor alles.
Krag en mag is in u hand,
om te verhoog en te versterk.
Ons dank U, ons God,
en prys u heerlike Naam!

“Maar wie is ek tog, en wie is my volk, dat ons enigiets vir U kan gee? Alles wat ons het, kom van U af, en ons gee vir U net dit wat U reeds vir ons gegee het! Net soos ons voorouers is ons vreemdelinge en bywoners in die land. Ons dae op die aarde gaan soos ’n skaduwee verby, sonder enige verwagting. HERE ons God, selfs hierdie boumateriaal wat ons ingesamel het om vir U ’n tempel te bou om u heilige Naam te eer, kom van U af. Dit behoort alles aan U! Ek weet, my God, dat U ons harte ondersoek en opregtheid verlang. U weet dat ek dit alles met goeie motiewe geskenk het, en ek het ook gesien hoe u volk vrywillig en vreugdevol hulle geskenke gebring het. HERE, God van ons voorouers Abraham, Isak en Israel, laat u volk altyd hierdie gesindheid behou. Laat hulle harte altyd getrou wees aan U. Gee my seun Salomo die heelhartige begeerte om al u bevele, gebooe en beginsels te gehoorsaam, en om hierdie tempel te bou, waarvoor ek al hierdie voorbereidings getref het.”

Daarna het Dawid vir die hele vergadering gesê: “Prys nou die HERE julle God!” Die hele vergadering het toe die HERE, die God van hulle voorouers, geloof. Hulle het in eerbied voor die HERE en die koning gekniel.

Wat was die middelpunt van hierdie leier se interessante persoonlikheid? Was dit mag en hebsug, die normale styl van konings? Nee. Dit was liefde vir God. Dawid was 'n man vol drif en passie, sy rykdom was veilig, en sy familie was so groot soos 'n klein dorpie. Maar 'n diep liefde vir God het sy lewe beheer en sy hart gevul. Neem die res weg en God het oorgebly. God was die vrygewige Gewer en die liefdevolle Vader wat Dawid van kindsbeen tot in sy ou dag gelei het. Dawid se poësie skilder 'n prentjie van sy verhouding met God – 'n beskermmer, Vader en Here.

Die HERE is my herder;
daar is niks wat my ontbreek nie.
Hy laat my lê in groen weivelde;
na water waar rus is, lei Hy my.
Hy gee my nuwe krag.
Hy lei my op die pad van geregtigheid
tot eer van sy Naam.
Wanneer ek loop
in 'n baie donker kloof,
sal ek nie bang wees nie,
want U is naby my.
U stok en u staf
beskerm en ondersteun my.

U berei vir my 'n feesmaal
voor die oë van al my vyande.
U verwelkom my as 'n eregas
deur my kop te salf met olie
en my beker oorvol te maak.
Waarlik, u goedheid en trou vergesel my
al die dae van my lewe;
en ek sal bly in die huis van die HERE
so lank as wat ek lewe.

Dawid het geweet sy dae as kryger is verby en sy energie om 'n nasie te lei, was besig om te kwyn. Tog het hy weerstand gebied teen die oordrag van mag aan sy seun Salomo. Eendag het sy pragtige vrou Batseba in sy oor gefluister: “Nou, Dawid, dit is nou die tyd.” En die koning het gedoen soos sy gesê het.

¹**Salomo:** “Salomo” klink na en is waarskynlik afgelei van “vrede”.

13

The King Who Had It All

WHEN KING DAVID WAS VERY OLD, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him.

Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room, where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him. Bathsheba bowed down, prostrating herself before the king.

“What is it you want?” the king asked.

She said to him, “My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the LORD your God: ‘Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.’”

The king then took an oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place.”

Then Bathsheba bowed down with her face to the ground, prostrating herself before the king, and said, “May my lord King David live forever!”



When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son.

“I am about to go the way of all the earth,” he said. “So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws

and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go and that the LORD may keep his promise to me: ‘If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.’”

Then David rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. He had reigned forty years over Israel — seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem. The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD. Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

“Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for — both wealth and honor — so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.” Then Solomon awoke — and he realized it had been a dream.

He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.

Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. One of them said, “Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me. The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us.

“During the night this woman’s son died because she lay on him. So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. The next morning, I got up to nurse my son — and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn’t the son I had borne.”

The other woman said, “No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.”

But the first one insisted, “No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.” And so they argued before the king.

The king said, “This one says, ‘My son is alive and your son is dead,’ while that one says, ‘No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.’”

Then the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So they brought a sword for the king. He then gave an order: “Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.”

The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!”

But the other said, “Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!”

Then the king gave his ruling: “Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother.”

When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon’s subjects all his life.

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite — wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

Solomon’s name is synonymous with wisdom, in part due to the collection of his sayings contained in the famous book of Proverbs. Touching on many life issues, these catchy couplets offer practical insight into what it means to fear God, to have God-honoring relationships and how to wisely handle finances, work and life.

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight;

for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
doing what is right and just and fair;

for giving prudence to those who are simple.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,

turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding —

indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,

and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,

then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God.

For the LORD gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,
from men whose words are perverse.

My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,

for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.

Let love and faithfulness never leave you;

bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.

Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;

in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the LORD and shun evil.

This will bring health to your body
and nourishment to your bones.

Honor the LORD with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;

then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,

because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.

Can a man walk on hot coals
without his feet being scorched?

So is he who sleeps with another man's wife;
no one who touches her will go unpunished.

A king's wrath strikes terror like the roar of a lion;
those who anger him forfeit their lives.

It is to one's honor to avoid strife,
but every fool is quick to quarrel.

Sluggards do not plow in season;
so at harvest time they look but find nothing.

The righteous lead blameless lives;
blessed are their children after them.

Differing weights and differing measures —
the LORD detests them both.

Do not love sleep or you will grow poor;
stay awake and you will have food to spare.

Gold there is, and rubies in abundance,
but lips that speak knowledge are a rare jewel.

Food gained by fraud tastes sweet,
but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel.

A gossip betrays a confidence;
so avoid anyone who talks too much.

If someone curses their father or mother,
their lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.

An inheritance claimed too
soon will not be blessed at the end.

Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!"
Wait for the LORD, and he will avenge you.

A person's steps are directed by the LORD.
How then can anyone understand their own way?

The human spirit is the lamp of the LORD
that sheds light on one's inmost being.

The glory of young men is their strength,
gray hair the splendor of the old.

In the LORD's hand the king's heart is a stream of water
that he channels toward all who please him.

A person may think their own ways are right,
but the LORD weighs the heart.

To do what is right and just
is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Haughty eyes and a proud heart —
the unplowed field of the wicked — produce sin.

The plans of the diligent lead to profit
as surely as haste leads to poverty.

A fortune made by a lying tongue
is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.

The violence of the wicked will drag them away,
for they refuse to do what is right.

The wicked crave evil;
their neighbors get no mercy from them.

Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor
will also cry out and not be answered.

A gift given in secret soothes anger,
and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath.

When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous
but terror to evildoers.

Whoever loves pleasure will become poor;
whoever loves wine and olive oil will never be rich.

Better to live in a desert
than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife.

The wise store up choice food and olive oil,
but fools gulp theirs down.

Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life,
prosperity and honor.

Those who guard their mouths and their tongues
keep themselves from calamity.

The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable —
how much more so when brought with evil intent!

A false witness will perish,
but a careful listener will testify successfully.

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan
that can succeed against the LORD.

The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but victory rests with the LORD.

Because his father's military success had secured Israel's borders, King Solomon could focus on diplomacy, architecture and temple construction. If David's first approach to neighbors was to brandish a sword, Solomon's was to say a wise word and cut a good deal. David was the warrior king; Solomon was the brilliant general contractor.

When Hiram king of Tyre heard that Solomon had been anointed king to succeed his father David, he sent his envoys to Solomon, because he had always been on friendly terms with David. Solomon sent back this message to Hiram:

“You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple for the Name of the LORD his God until the LORD put his enemies under his feet. But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster. I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the LORD my God, as the LORD told my father

David, when he said, ‘Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name.’

“So give orders that cedars of Lebanon be cut for me. My men will work with yours, and I will pay you for your men whatever wages you set. You know that we have no one so skilled in felling timber as the Sidonians.”

When Hiram heard Solomon's message, he was greatly pleased and said, “Praise be to the LORD today, for he has given David a wise son to rule over this great nation.”

So Hiram sent word to Solomon:

“I have received the message you sent me and will do all you want in providing the cedar and juniper logs. My men will haul them down from Lebanon to the Mediterranean Sea, and I will float them as rafts by sea to the place you specify. There I will separate them and you can take them away. And you are to grant my wish by providing food for my royal household.”

In this way Hiram kept Solomon supplied with all the cedar and juniper logs he wanted, and Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand cors of wheat as food for his household, in addition to twenty thousand baths of pressed olive oil. Solomon continued to do this for Hiram year after year. The LORD gave Solomon wisdom, just as he had promised him. There were peaceful relations between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a treaty.

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD.

Construction details revealed a temple of modest footprint (90 feet by 30 feet) but of spectacular beauty and historic significance. Two bronze pillars led to the portico, which then led to the Holy Place, built with cedar, pine, juniper and olive wood, and then the Most Holy Place, overlaid in gold. The ark of God was placed in the Most Holy Place, where entry was limited to the high priest. The floor plan of Solomon’s temple followed the pattern of the tabernacle Moses had built during the Israelites’ wilderness journey. Construction took seven years of work by 180,000 conscripted laborers and nearly 4,000 supervisors. The percussion of hammer and chisel rang loud at the quarry. At the building site itself, a quiet solemnity anticipated the inauguration of the house of God.

When all the work King Solomon had done for the temple of the LORD was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated — the silver and gold and the furnishings — and he placed them in the treasuries of the LORD’s temple.

Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the

elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the LORD's covenant from Zion, the City of David. All the Israelites came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim, the seventh month.

When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark, and they brought up the ark of the LORD and the tent of meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests and Levites carried them up, and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.

The priests then brought the ark of the LORD's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions. All the Levites who were musicians — Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun and their sons and relatives — stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang:

“He is good;

his love endures forever.”

Then the temple of the LORD was filled with the cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God.

Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever.”

While the whole assembly of Israel was standing there, the king

turned around and blessed them.

Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said:

“Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below — you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it — as it is today.

“But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! Yet give attention to your servant’s prayer and his plea for mercy, LORD my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, ‘My Name shall be there,’ so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.

“Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

“Now arise, LORD God, and come to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.

May your priests, LORD God, be clothed with salvation,
may your faithful people rejoice in your goodness.

LORD God, do not reject your anointed one.

Remember the great love promised to David your servant.”

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying,

“He is good;

his love endures forever.”

When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:

“Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day’s need, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other. And may your hearts be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.”

Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the LORD. And King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats. So the king and all the people dedicated the temple of God.

When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal

palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace, the LORD appeared to him at night and said:

“I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

“As for you, if you walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.’

“But if you ¹ turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?’ People will answer, ‘Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them — that is why he brought all this disaster on them.’”

The gold ornamentation and cedar woodwork in the temple brought glory to God and were gifts of beauty to many generations. But God reminded Solomon that faithfulness, integrity of heart, uprightness and obedience were what he desired even more. All this Solomon heard, believed and followed even when faced with the accolades of admirers. Visitors came from everywhere to meet this famous king.

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the LORD, she came to test Solomon with hard questions. Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan — with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones — she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed.

She said to the king, “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the LORD’s eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness.”

And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for, besides what he had given her out of his royal bounty. Then she left and returned with her retinue to her own country.

The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the territories.

King Solomon made two hundred large shields of hammered gold; six hundred shekels of gold went into each shield. He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold, with three minas of gold in each shield. The king put them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

Then the king made a great throne covered with ivory and overlaid

with fine gold. The throne had six steps, and its back had a rounded top. On both sides of the seat were armrests, with a lion standing beside each of them. Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom. All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days. The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons.

King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift — articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.

Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue — the royal merchants purchased them from Kue at the current price. They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.

During Solomon's time, polygamy was considered normal (but was not sanctioned by God). Like other kings, Solomon had a large harem of wives, some of whom were from other nations. For Solomon, unfortunately, the irresistible draw of sweet perfume led to relaxing his guard against pagan worship as well ... a bad decision from a fellow renowned for wisdom. It was the beginning of the end.

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter — Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon

grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command. So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

*1*You: The Hebrew is plural for both instances of *you* in this sentence.

Die koning wat alles gehad het

Koning Dawid het baie oud geword. Hy kon nie meer warm word nie, al het hulle hom met baie komberse toegemaak.

Batseba het toe in die koning se slaapkamer ingegaan. Hy was teen hierdie tyd reeds baie oud. Abisag, die Sunemmitiese meisie, het hom versorg. Batseba het laag voor hom gebuig.

“Wat kan ek vir jou doen?” vra die koning haar.

Sy het geantwoord: “My heer, u het my voor die HERE u God met ’n eed belowe: ‘Jou seun Salomo sal beslis ná my koning word en op my troon sit.’”

Die koning lê toe ’n eed af: “So seker as wat die HERE leef wat my uit elke gevaar gered het, soos ek tevore met ’n eed voor die HERE, die God van Israel, vir jou belowe het, bevestig ek dit vandag dat jou seun Salomo ná my koning sal word en op my troon sal sit.”

Batseba buig toe weer laag voor hom en sê: “Mag my heer koning Dawid vir altyd lewe!”



Toe dit duidelik word dat Dawid se dood voor die deur is, het hy sy seun Salomo beveel:

“Dis tyd dat ek die pad van alle mense moet gaan. Wees sterk en dapper. Volg die vereistes van die HERE jou God en leef daarvolgens. Wees gehoorsaam aan sy gebooie, bevele, opdragte en bepalinge soos dit opgeteken is in die voorskrifte van Moses. Jy sal dan suksesvol wees in alles wat jy doen en waar jy ook al gaan. As jy só lewe, sal die HERE sy beloftes aan my vervul. Hy het gesê: ‘As jou afstammeling in waarheid voor My lewe en My met algehele toewyding getrou navolg, sal daar altyd een van hulle op die troon van Israel wees.’”

Daarna het Dawid gesterf en is in die Dawidstad begrawe. Hy het 40 jaar lank oor Israel regeer, sewe jaar in Hebron en 33 jaar in Jerusalem. Salomo het sy pa, Dawid, opgevolg en het sy koningskap stewig gevestig.

Salomo het 'n verdrag gesluit met Farao, die koning van Egipte. Hy het met een van sy dogters getrou en haar na die Dawidstad toe gebring. Hy het haar daar laat woon totdat hy sy paleis, die tempel van die HERE en die muur rondom die stad voltooi het. Toe het die Israeliete nog oral op die hoogtes geoffer omdat daar nog nie 'n tempel tot eer van die Naam van die HERE was nie. Salomo het die HERE liefgehad en het volgens die voorskrifte van sy pa, Dawid, gelewe. Hy het egter ook nog op die hoogtes geoffer.

Die belangrikste van hierdie altare was by Gibeon. Daarom het die koning daarheen gegaan en 1 000 brandoffers geoffer. Daardie nag het die HERE in Gibeon in 'n droom aan Salomo verskyn en God het gesê: "Vra wat jy wil hê en Ek sal dit vir jou gee!"

Salomo het geantwoord: "U was baie goed vir my pa, Dawid, omdat hy eerlik, opreg en getrou aan U was. U was besonder goed deur boonop vir hom 'n seun te gee wat hom kon opvolg.

"O HERE my God, U het my koning gemaak in die plek van my pa, Dawid. Maar ek is soos 'n klein seuntjie wat nog nie weet hoe om op te tree nie. Hier is ek tussen die mense van die volk wat U uitverkies het, 'n volk so talryk dat hulle nie getel kan word nie! Gee my tog die vermoë om met verstandigheid en regverdigheid oor u volk te regeer, want wie kan op sy eie oor hierdie groot volk van U regeer?"

Die Here was tevrede met Salomo se antwoord en was bly dat hy hierdie dinge gevra het. Die HERE het hom geantwoord: "Omdat jy dit gevra het en nie vir 'n lang lewe of rykdom of die dood van jou vyande nie, maar vir onderskeiding om met insig te kan oordeel; daarom sal Ek vir jou gee wat jy gevra het. Ek sal jou die vermoë gee van wysheid en insig soos niemand voor jou gehad het of na jou sal hê nie! Daarby gee Ek vir jou ook dit waarvoor jy nie gevra het nie, naamlik rykdom en aansien. So lank as wat jy leef, sal geen koning met jou vergelyk kan word nie. As jy My dien en gehoorsaam is aan my voorskrifte en bepalings soos jou pa, Dawid, sal Ek jou 'n lang lewe gee." Toe het Salomo wakker geword en besef dat dit 'n droom was.

Hy het na Jerusalem toe teruggekeer en voor die verbondsark van die Here gaan staan en brandoffers en maaltydoffers gebring. Daarna het hy al sy amptenare op 'n groot feesmaal trakteer.

’n Tyd daarna het twee prostitute na die koning toe gekom vir beslegting van ’n geskil. “Asseblief, my heer die koning,” het die een gesê, “ek en hierdie vrou bly saam in dieselfde huis. Ek het ’n baba in die wêreld gebring terwyl sy by my in die huis was. Drie dae later het sy ook ’n baba gehad. Ons was alleen, en daar was geen ander persoon nie. Dis net die twee van ons wat in die huis was.

“Een nag het haar seuntjie gesterf toe sy op hom gelê het. In die middel van die nag het sy opgestaan terwyl ek nog geslaap het en my seuntjie gevat. Sy neem toe haar dooie kind, lê hom in my arms en neem myne om by haar te slaap. Toe ek in die oggend my kind wou laat drink, ontdek ek dat hy dood is! Maar toe ek hom later in die oggend goed bekyk, merk ek dat dit glad nie my seun is nie.”

Die ander vrou val haar toe in die rede: “Nee! Die een wat lewe, is my seun! Die dooie een is beslis jou seun!”

“Nee,” sê die eerste vrou, “die seuntjie wat dood is, is joune en die lewende een is myne!” So het hulle voor die koning met mekaar gestry.

Toe sê die koning: “Albei van julle maak aanspraak op die lewende kind, en albei sê die dooie een is die ander een s’n. Goed, bring vir my ’n swaard.” Iemand het vir hom ’n swaard gebring.

Hy sê toe: “Sny die lewende kind in twee en gee ’n helfte vir elkeen van hulle!”

Maar die ma van die lewende kind roep toe uit: “Nee, my heer! Gee dan liever die lewende kind vir haar, maar moenie hom doodmaak nie!”

Maar die ander vrou sê: “Dis goed so, dan sal hy nóg myne nóg joune wees. Sny hom deur!”

Toe sê die koning: “Moenie die kind doodmaak nie. Gee die lewende kind aan die eerste vrou. Sy is die regte ma!”

Die koning se uitspraak het in die hele Israel bekend geword. Hulle het groot respek vir die koning gekry, want hulle het besef dat God besondere wysheid aan hom gegee het om regverdig te kan oordeel.

Die mense van Juda en Israel was so baie soos die sand van die see; hulle het geëet, gedrink en was gelukkig. En Salomo het regeer oor al die koninkryke vanaf die Eufraatrivier tot by die land van die Filistyne, so ver as die grens van Egipte. Hierdie lande het eer gebring aan en was Salomo se onderdane sy hele lewe lank.

God het vir Salomo baie wysheid en onderskeiding gegee, en ook kennis wat soos die sand aan die see nie gemeet kan word nie.

Trouens, sy wysheid het dié van die wyse manne van die ooste en dié van Egipte ver oortref. Hy was wyser as enigiemand anders, meer as Etan die Esragiet en Heman, Kalkol en Darda, die seuns van Magol. Sy naam het bekend geword onder al die omliggende nasies. Hy het 3 000 spreuke geskryf en 1 005 liedere gedig. Hy kon met gesag praat oor bome en plante, van die groot seders van die Libanon tot die kleinste hisop wat uit die mure groei. Hy kon ook praat oor diere, voëls, reptiele en visse. Mense het van oral af gekom om na die wysheid van Salomo te luister. Al die konings van die wêreld wat van sy wysheid gehoor het, het gesante gestuur.

Salomo se naam is sinoniem met wysheid, gedeeltelik te danke aan sy versameling spreuke wat in die bekende boek Spreuke opgeneem is. Hierdie spreuke raak lewensake aan en gee praktiese insig in wat dit beteken om God te vrees, om 'n God-vererende verhouding te hê en om 'n mens se finansies, werk en die lewe wys te hanteer.

Hierdie is die spreuke van Salomo, die seun van Dawid, die koning van Israel.

Die doel van hierdie spreuke is om mense wysheid te leer
en hulle te onderrig.

Dit sal hulle help om wyse woorde te verstaan.

Deur hierdie woorde sal hulle dissipline leer

en weet hoe om regverdig, reg en billik op te tree.

Iemand wat nog onervare is, sal verstandig word.

Die spreuke sal jongmense kennis gee

en onderskeidingsvermoë.

Kennis begin met eerbied vir die HERE,
net dwase verag wysheid en dissipline.

My seun, luister mooi na wat ek vir jou sê.

Bewaar wat ek vir jou leer.

Spits jou ore vir die wysheid.

Span jou in om dit te verstaan.

Roep na insig.

Roep hardop vir begrip.

Soek daarna soos jy na silwer sou soek.

Spoor dit op soos 'n versteekte skat.

Dan sal jy weet wat dit beteken

om respek te hê vir die HERE.
Jy sal leer om God te ken.
Dit is tog die HERE wat wysheid gee.
Sy woorde gee kennis en insig.

Dit sal jou weerhou van 'n verkeerde lewenswyse.
Dit sal jou weghou van mense
wat besig is met verkeerde dinge.

My seun, moenie vergeet wat ek jou geleer het nie.
Hou vas aan my opdragte.
Dit sal jou lank laat lewe
en jou 'n voorspoedige lewe gee.

Moenie dat jy tekort skiet aan liefde en getrouheid nie.
Koester dit soos iets waardevols wat jy om jou nek dra.
Skryf dit op die tafel van jou hart.
Jy sal guns en 'n goeie naam verkry
by God en by mense.

Vertrou op die HERE met alles wat jy het.
Moenie staatmaak op jou eie insigte nie.
Vra na die wil van God in alles wat jy doen.
Hy sal die regte pad vir jou wys.

Moenie jou eie wysheid oorskat nie.
Hou eerder die HERE voor oë en vermy wat sleg is.
Dit sal jou liggaam gesond hou,
jou lewe verkwik.

Vereer die HERE met alles wat jy besit.
Gee vir Hom die beste van jou oes.
Hy sal jou opgaarplekke vol maak.
Jou parskuipe sal oorloop van al die wyn.

My seun, moenie dit verontagsaam
wanneer die HERE jou reghelp nie.
Moenie jou verset wanneer Hy jou tereg wys nie.
Die HERE bestraf immers hulle wat Hy liefhet
net soos 'n pa sy seun tereg wys.

Kan jy op brandende kole loop

en nie jou voete skroei nie?
Net so is dit met iemand
wat by 'n ander man se vrou gaan slaap.
Niemand wat met haar lol,
sal ongedeerd daarvan afkom nie.

'n Koning wek net soveel vrees as 'n leeu wat brul.
Jy stel jou lewe in gevaar as jy hom kwaad maak.

Dit is eerbaarder om op te hou met 'n rusie;
dis net dwase wat rusie soek.

'n Luiaard ploeg nie wanneer dit saaityd is nie.
Wanneer hy oestyd na iets soek,
is daar niks om te oes nie.

Hy wat opreg en eerlik leef,
se kinders is baie gelukkig.

Die HERE het nie tyd
vir dubbele standaarde en vals mate nie.

Moenie lief wees vir slaap nie; jy kan in armoede verval.
Wees wakker, en jy sal genoeg hê om te eet.

Woorde wat uit kennis kom,
is kosbaarder as baie goud en edelstene.

Kos wat gesteel is, proe aanvanklik lekker.
Agterna word dit klippies in jou mond.

Iemand wat loop en skinder, lap geheime uit.
Bly weg van iemand wat alte maklik praat.

Wie sy pa en ma vervloek,
se lewe eindig onverwags
soos 'n lamp wat doodgaan in pikdonker.

Besittings oneerlik verkry,
maak jou op die lang duur nie gelukkig nie.

Moenie sê: "Ek sal my wreek op die kwaad

wat aan my gedoen is” nie.
Wag eerder op die HERE. Hy sal jou saak hanteer.

Die HERE bepaal ’n mens se lewe.
Hoe kan ’n mens verstaan wat met hom moet gebeur?

Die soeklig van die HERE val op die mens se lewe.
Hy bring die diepste motiewe aan die lig.

Jong manne se mooiheid lê in hulle krag.
Dit is hulle grysheid wat oumense mooi maak.

Die HERE stuur die koning soos Hy wil.
Dit is soos ’n stroom water
wat Hy afkeer waarheen Hy wil.

’n Mens dink dalk alles wat hy doen, is reg.
Die HERE besluit egter oor die bedoeling daaragter.

Die HERE hou meer daarvan dat iemand
reg doen en regverdig optree
as dat hy offers vir Hom bring.

Hovaardige oë en hoogmoedige harte
is ’n kenmerk van goddeloses,
dit is hulle sonde.

Getroue werk lewer wins op.
Afskeepwerk lei tot gebrek.

Skatte met leuens verwerf,
beteken niks en bring net die dood.

Die geweld van goddeloses sleur hulle mee.
Hulle weier mos om te doen wat reg is.

’n Slegte mens wens ander net sleg toe.
Hy het niks oor vir sy medemens nie.

Iemand wat sy ore toedruk vir die hulpkreet van ’n arme,
sal self ook verniet roep as moeilikheid hom tref.

’n Geskenk ongesiens gegee, koel die man wat kwaad is af.

As 'n omkoopgeskenk onopsigtelik gegee word,
laat dit driftige woede bedaar.

Dit maak regverdige mense bly wanneer reg opgetree word.
Dit maak dié wat kwaad doen, bang.

Wie agter plesier aanloop, word 'n arm mens.
Wie lief is vir wyn en weelde, word nooit ryk nie.

Dit is beter om iewers in die woestyn te gaan bly
as saam met 'n strygerige vrou wat oor alles neul.

In 'n wyse mens se huis is altyd
kosbare besittings en uitgesoekte olie.
'n Dwase mens gebruik alles op wat hy in sy huis het.

Iemand wat hom beywer vir reg en liefde,
verkry 'n vol lewe, geregtigheid en eer.

Wie 'n wag voor sy mond het en stilbly,
hou homself uit die moeilikheid.

God verafsku die offers wat goddeloses bring,
veral as hulle dit doen met allerlei bymotiewe.

'n Vals getuie sal omkom.
'n Betroubare getuie se getuienis staan vas.

Geen menslike wysheid, of insig, of besluit
kan voor die HERE bly staan nie.

Perde kan afgerig word vir oorlog,
maar die oorwinning kom net van die HERE.

Omdat sy pa se militêre sukses Israel se grense beveilig het, kon koning Salomo op diplomاسie, argitektuur en die oprigting van die tempel konsentreer. As Dawid se eerste optrede tot Israel se bure was om 'n swaard uit te trek, was Salomo s'n om 'n wyse woord te spreek en 'n goeie ooreenkoms aan te gaan. Dawid was die kryger-koning, Salomo was die briljante algemene strateeg.

Koning Hiram van Tirus was al die jare 'n getroue vriend van

Dawid. Toe hy verneem dat Dawid se seun Salomo as koning van Israel gesalf is, het hy gesante gestuur om hom geluk te wens. Salomo het vir hom die volgende boodskap gestuur:

“U weet dat my pa, Dawid, nie ’n tempel tot eer van die Naam van die HERE sy God kon bou nie omdat hy reg rondom oorloë moes voer totdat die HERE hom die oorhand gegee het. Maar nou het die HERE my God vir my aan alle kante vrede gegee. Daar is geen vyande of gevaar wat my bedreig nie. Daarom beplan ek om ’n tempel tot eer van die Naam van die HERE my God te bou. Dit is soos die HERE my pa belowe het toe Hy gesê het: ‘Jou seun wat Ek in jou plek op die troon sal sit, sal ’n tempel tot eer van my Naam bou.’

“Nou versoek ek u dat u asseblief vir my seders op die Libanon sal laat afkap. Laat my arbeiders saam met u arbeiders werk. Ek sal vir u arbeiders betaal wat u vra. Soos u weet, kan niemand van ons mense bome kap soos die Sidoniërs kan nie!”

Toe Hiram hierdie boodskap van Salomo kry, was hy baie in sy skik en het gesê: “Loof die HERE wat vir Dawid ’n wyse seun gegee het om koning te wees van die groot volk Israel.”

Hy het die volgende antwoord aan Salomo gestuur:

“Ek het u versoek ontvang en sal u voorsien van sowel sederhout as sipreshout soos u versoek het. My arbeiders sal die stompe van die Libanonberge na die see toe bring en dit in vlotte aanmekaarbind. Ons sal hulle dan al seelangs laat dryf tot by die plek wat u verkies. Ons sal daar die vlotte opbreek en die hout aan u oorhandig. U kan my dan betaal deur my met die kos te voorsien wat ek vir my huishouding nodig het.”

Op dié manier het Hiram vir Salomo soveel seder- en sipreshout verskaf soos wat hy nodig gehad het. Salomo het jaarliks vir Hiram se hofhouding 3 300 ton koring en 4 400 liter suiwer olyfolie voorsien. Die HERE het aan Salomo wysheid gegee soos Hy belowe het. Daar was ’n goeie verhouding tussen Hiram en Salomo. Hulle het ook ’n vredesverdrag gesluit.

Ongeveer in die middel van die lente, vier jaar nadat hy koning geword het, het Salomo die tempel van die HERE begin bou. Dit was 480 jaar nadat die Israeliete uit slawerny in Egipte verlos is.

Wanneer 'n mens na die besonderhede van die konstruksie kyk, was die tempel nie baie groot nie (27 meter by 9 meter), maar dit was ongelooflik mooi en het geweldige historiese waarde gehad. Twee bronspilare het na die voorhof gelei, wat op sy beurt na die Heilige deel gelei het wat van sederhout, dennehout, sipresbome en olyfhout gebou was, en daarna na die Allerheiligste, wat met goud oorgetrek was. Die ark van die Here is in die Allerheiligste geplaas, waar toegang beperk was tot die hoëpriester. Die vloerplan van Salomo se tempel het ooreengestem met die tabernakel wat Moses gebou het gedurende die Israeliete se reis deur die woestyn. 180 000 hande-arbeiders en amper 4 000 toesighouers het sewe jaar aan die tempel gebou. Die geluid van hamers en beitels het hard weerklink in die steengroef. By die bouverseel self het 'n heilige stilte geheers in afwagting op die inwyding van God se huis.

Salomo het al die werk aan die tempel van die HERE afgehandel. Daarna het Salomo al die geskenke wat sy pa, Dawid, aan die HERE gewy het in die voorraadkamers van die HERE se tempel gebêre. Dit het bestaan uit silwer, goud en toebehore.

Salomo roep toe die leiers van Israel, al die stamhoofde en familiehoofde, bymekaar in Jerusalem. Hulle moes die verbondsark van die HERE uit die Dawidstad, ook bekend as Sion, na die tempel oorbring. Op die feesdag in die vroeë herfs het almal in Israel by koning Salomo bymekaargekom.

Toe al die leiers van Israel daar was, het die priesters die ark opgetel. Die priesters en Leviete het die ark van die HERE, die tent van ontmoeting en al die gewyde toebehore uit die tent van ontmoeting gedra. Koning Salomo en die hele gemeente van Israel was saam voor die ark bymekaar. Hulle het kleinvee en beeste voor die ark geoffer. Daar was so baie dat niemand dit kon tel of bereken nie.

Daarna het die priesters die verbondsark van die HERE na die binneste heiligdom van die tempel, die Allerheiligste, gebring en dit onder die vlerke van die gerubs neergesit.

Toe het die priesters die heiligdom verlaat. Al die priesters teenwoordig het hulleself gereinig, of hulle daardie dag aan diens was of nie. Die Leviete wat musikante was, Asaf, Heman, Jedutun, saam met hulle seuns en broers, het oos van die altaar gestaan. Hulle het fyn linneklere aangehad en op simbale, harpe en liere gespeel. By hulle was daar 120 priesters wat op trompette geblaas het. Die trompetspelers en sangers het saam as eenheid opgetree met lofsang

en dank aan die HERE. Met begeleiding van trompette, simbale en ander instrumente, het hulle gesing en met hierdie woorde die HERE geprys:

“Hy is goed!

Sy troue liefde duur vir altyd!”

Op daardie oomblik het ’n wolk die tempel van die HERE gevul. Die priesters kon nie hulle verpligtings nakom vanweë die wolk nie, want die heerlike teenwoordigheid van die HERE het die tempel van God gevul.

Toe het Salomo gebid: “O HERE, U het gesê dat U in duisternis woon. Daarom het ek vir U ’n glorieryke tempel gebou, waar U vir altyd kan woon!”

Daarna het die koning hom gedraai na die hele vergadering van Israel wat voor hom gestaan het en hulle geseën.

Daarna het Salomo met sy hande uitgestrek gaan staan voor die altaar van die HERE en voor die hele gemeente van Israel. Toe het hy gebid:

“HERE, God van Israel, in die hemel of op die hele aarde is daar geen God soos U nie. U bly getrou aan u verbond en het u troue liefde betoon aan almal wat U heelhartig met ywer dien. U het u beloftes aan u dienaar, my pa Dawid, nagekom. U het die belofte met u eie mond gemaak, en vandag het U dit met u eie hande vervul.

“Maar kan dit moontlik wees dat God op die aarde tussen mense sou woon? Die hemel, selfs die hoogste hemel, kan U nie bevat nie. Wat nog te sê hierdie tempel wat ek vir U gebou het! Luister tog na my gebed en smeking, HERE my God. Luister na die roepstem en die gebed wat u dienaar tot U rig. Hou tog dag en nag ’n wakende oog oor hierdie tempel. Dis die plek waarvan U gesê het dat u Naam daar sal woon sodat U altyd die gebed sal hoor wat ek na hierdie plek toe rig. Luister tog na die smekinge wat ek en u volk Israel na hierdie plek toe sal bid. Mag U ons hoor in die hemel waar U woon, en wanneer U hoor, vergewe tog.

“My God, kyk tog, en luister aandagtig na al hulle gebede in hierdie plek.

“En nou, HERE God, kom na u rusplek,

U en u magtige ark.
Mag u priesters, HERE God, geklee wees met redding,
en mag u gelowiges juig in u goedheid.
HERE God, moenie u gesalfde verwerp nie.
Onthou tog u onfeilbare liefde vir u dienaar Dawid.”

Toe Salomo klaar gebid het, het daar vuur uit die hemel gekom en die brandoffers en ander offers verbrand. Die heerlikheid van die HERE het die tempel gevul. Die priesters kon nie die tempel van die HERE binnegaan nie as gevolg van die glansryke teenwoordigheid van die HERE. Toe die hele volk van Israel sien hoe die vuur en die heerlikheid van die HERE op die tempel neerdaal, het hulle met die gesig op die grond neergeval en die HERE aanbid en geprys:

“Hy is goed!
Sy goedheid duur vir altyd!”

Nadat Salomo klaar gebid het en hierdie dinge van die HERE gevra het, het hy opgestaan van waar hy voor die altaar van die HERE met sy hande uitgestrek na die hemel toe gekniel het. Hy het gaan staan en die hele gemeente van Israel hardop soos volg geseën:

“Loof die HERE wat vir sy volk Israel rus gegee het soos Hy beloof het. Nie een woord van al die goeie beloftes wat Hy vir Moses gegee het, het onvervuld gebly nie. Mag die HERE ons God met ons wees soos Hy met ons voorouers was. Mag Hy ons nooit verlaat of ons laat vaar nie. Mag Hy ons die gewilligheid gee om in alles sy wil te doen en om al sy gebooe, bevele en bepalings wat Hy vir ons voorouers gegee het, te gehoorsaam. En mag hierdie woorde wat ek voor die HERE gebid het voortdurend, dag en nag, by Hom wees sodat die HERE ons God my saak en die saak van sy volk Israel volgens ons daaglikse behoeftes in stand sal hou. Dan sal mense oor die hele wêreld weet dat die HERE God is en dat daar geen ander god is nie. En mag julle ten volle toegewy wees aan die HERE ons God sodat julle altyd sy bevele en gebooe gehoorsaam soos wat julle dit vandag doen.”

Daarna het die koning en die hele Israel saam met hom offers aan die HERE gebring. Salomo het 22 000 beeste en 120 000 kleinvee as maaltydoffers aan die HERE gebring. So het die koning en die hele Israel die tempel van die HERE ingewy.

So het Salomo die tempel van die HERE, asook die koninklike paleis, voltooi. Hy het alles wat hy beplan het om te doen, suksesvol afgehandel. Een nag het die HERE aan Salomo verskyn en gesê:

“Ek het jou gebed verhoor en het hierdie tempel vir Myself gekies as die plek waar daar offers vir My gebring moet word.

“Soms sal Ek die hemele toesluit sodat daar geen reën val nie, of Ek kan bepaal dat sprinkane julle oeste opvreet, of Ek kan dalk plaë onder julle stuur. Wanneer die volk wat my Naam dra, hulle verootmoedig en bid, en My weer soek en hulle afkeer van hulle bose lewens, sal Ek in die hemel hoor en hulle sondes vergewe en hulle land gesond maak. Ek sal ’n oog hou oor hierdie plek en luister na elke gebed wat hier opgestuur word, want Ek het hierdie tempel gekies en dit afgesonder om vir altyd my woning te wees. My oë en my hart sal altyd daar wees.

“Wat jou betref: As jy My volg soos jou pa Dawid, doen wat Ek beveel het en al my voorskrifte, gebooie en bepalings gehoorsaam, sal Ek toesien dat niemand jou koninklike troon wegneem nie. Dit is dieselfde belofte wat Ek vir jou pa Dawid gegee het toe Ek gesê het: ‘Jy sal nooit sonder ’n opvolger wees wat oor Israel regeer nie.’

“Maar as julle My verlaat en ongehoorsaam is aan my gebooie en die voorskrifte wat Ek vir julle gegee het, en as julle ander gode dien en hulle aanbid, dan sal Ek die volk Israel ontwortel uit hierdie land van My wat Ek vir hulle gegee het. Ek sal hierdie tempel verwerp wat Ek afgesonder het om my Naam te eer. Ek sal dit tot bespottling en minagting onder die volke maak. En hoewel hierdie tempel nou indrukwekkend is, sal almal wat verbykom, verskrik wees. Hulle sal vra: ‘Hoekom het die HERE sulke verskriklike dinge aan hierdie land en hierdie tempel gedoen?’ En die antwoord sal wees: ‘Omdat sy volk die HERE, die God van hulle voorouers wat hulle uit Egipte gebring het, laat vaar het en eerder ander gode aangehang, voor hulle gebuig en hulle gedien het. Dit is waarom Hy al hierdie rampe oor hulle gebring het.’”

Die goue toebehore en sederhoutwerk in die tempel het God verheerlik en was pragtige geskenke vir die volgende generasies. Maar God het vir Salomo daaraan herinner dat getrouheid, integriteit, opregtheid en gehoorsaamheid selfs belangriker is. Salomo het dit alles gehoor, geglo en gevolg, selfs wanneer hy deur ander geprys is. Besoekers het van oral af gekom om die bekende koning te ontmoet.

Toe die koningin van Skeba van Salomo se aansien en van die Naam van die HERE hoor, het sy self gekom om hom met moeilike vrae te toets. Sy het in Jerusalem aangekom saam met 'n groot gevolg en kamele belaaï met speserye, baie goud en kosbare edelstene. Sy het met Salomo oor alles gepraat wat in haar gemoed was. Salomo het 'n antwoord op elkeen van haar vrae gehad. Niks was vir die koning te moeilik om te verduidelik nie. Die koningin van Skeba was beïndruk met Salomo se wysheid, die paleis wat hy gebou het, die kos op sy tafel, hoe hy sy amptenare laat aansit het, die bediening en die uniforms van sy tafelbediendes en sy kelners, asook die brandoffers wat Salomo by die tempel van die HERE geoffer het. Dit alles het haar na haar asem laat snak.

Sy sê toe vir die koning: “Alles wat ek in my land van u en u wysheid gehoor het, is waar! Ek kon dit nie glo voordat ek hier aangekom het en dit self met my eie oë gesien het nie. Trouens, ek het nie eers van die helfte daarvan gehoor nie! U wysheid en voorspoed is baie meer as waarvan ek gehoor het. Hoe bevoorreg is hierdie volk! Wat 'n voorreg vir u amptenare om in u diens te staan en hier dag vir dag u wysheid aan te hoor! Die HERE u God kom die lof toe omdat Hy soveel liefde aan u bewys het en u op die troon van Israel gesit het. Dis omdat die HERE Israel eindeloos liefhet dat Hy u koning oor Israel gemaak het sodat u in reg en geregtigheid kan regeer.”

Toe gee sy vir die koning 'n geskenk van meer as vier ton goud, baie speserye en waardevolle edelstene. Nooit weer is so baie speserye die land ingebring soos wat die koningin van Skeba vir Salomo gegee het nie.

Koning Salomo het vir die koningin van Skeba alles gegee waarvoor sy gevra het. Dit was bo en behalwe die ander geskenke wat hy as koning gegee het. Daarna het sy en haar gevolg vertrek en na haar eie land toe teruggegaan.

Salomo se inkomste was jaarliks ongeveer 23 ton goud. Dit is afgesien van die inkomste wat hy van reisigers en handelaars, al die konings van Arabië en die streeksbestuurders in Israel ontvang het.

Koning Salomo het 200 groot skilde van bladgoud gemaak. Hy het ongeveer sewe kilogram goud vir elke skild gebruik. Hy het ook 300 klein skilde van bladgoud gemaak en ongeveer twee kilogram goud vir elkeen gebruik. Die koning het hierdie skilde in die Libanonsbosgebou geplaas.

Die koning het ook 'n groot troon van ivoor gemaak en dit met suiwer goud oorgetrek. Die troon het ses trappies gehad en die

kopstuk agter was rond. Aan albei kante van die troon was daar armleunings met 'n beeld van 'n leeu langsaan. Twaalf beelde van leeus het op die ses trappies gestaan, een aan weerskante van 'n trappie. Daar was geen gelyke hiervan in enige ander koninkryk nie. Koning Salomo se drinkbekers was van goud. So ook al die gebruiksartikels in die Libanonsbosgebou. Niks is van silwer gemaak nie omdat dit in Salomo se tyd geen waarde gehad het nie. Die koning het 'n Tarsisvloot gehad wat saam met dié van Hiram uitgevaar het. Elke drie jaar het hierdie Tarsisvloot teruggekeer, belaai met goud, silwer, ivoor, ape en bobbejane.

Koning Salomo het al die konings op aarde oortref in rykdom en wysheid. Mense oor die hele wêreld wou hom besoek om die wysheid te hoor wat God vir hom gegee het. Elkeen wat hom besoek het, het vir hom geskenke van silwer en goud, klere, wapens, speserye, perde en muile saamgebring. Dit het jaar na jaar gebeur.

Salomo het 'n groot mag van strydwaens en ruiters opgebou. Hy het 1 400 strydwaens gehad en 12 000 perderuiters. Hy het hulle in die strydwastede geplaas en sommige by die koning in Jerusalem. Silwer was so volop soos klippe in Jerusalem en sederhout was so algemeen soos wildevye in die Laeveld van Juda. Sy perde het hy uit Egipte en Kewé ingevoer. Die koninklike handelaars het hulle daar teen 'n bepaalde prys aangekoop. Egiptiese strydwaens het sewe kilogram silwer elk gekos en 'n perd sowat een en 'n driekwart kilogram silwer. 'n Perd is teen dieselfde prys aan die konings van die Hetiete en die konings van Aram verkoop. Die transaksies is deur middel van die handelaars gedoen.

In Salomo se tyd is poligamie as normaal beskou (maar nie deur God goedgekeur nie). Soos ander konings het Salomo ook 'n groot harem met vroue uit ander nasies gehad. Ongelukkig het die onweerstaanbare aantrekkingskrag van soet parfuim daartoe gelei dat Salomo nie meer so paraat was teen afgodsaanbidding nie ... 'n baie slegte besluit van 'n man bekend om sy wysheid. Dit was die begin van die einde.

Koning Salomo het baie buitelandse vroue liefgekry. Benewens die farao se dogter het hy vroue uit Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon en uit die Hetiete gehad. Die HERE het duidelik vir die Israëliete gesê: “Julle mag nie met hierdie nasies ondertrou nie. Hulle sal julle verlei om hulle gode te aanbid.” Nogtans het Salomo op hulle verlief geraak. Hy het 700 vroue van koninklike afkoms gehad en 300 byvroue. Hierdie

vroue het hom toe inderdaad verlei. Toe Salomo oud geword het, het hulle hom verlei om ander gode te dien. Hy het nie meer die HERE sy God met soveel toewyding gedien soos sy pa, Dawid, gedoen het nie. Salomo het Astarte, die godin van die Sidoniërs, en Milkom, die afskuwelike godin van die Ammoniete, aanbid.

Die HERE was baie ontevrede met Salomo omdat hy die HERE, die God van Israel wat twee keer aan hom verskyn het, verlaat het. Hy het Salomo uitdruklik gewaarsku om nie ander gode te dien nie. Nogtans het Salomo nie na die bevele van die HERE geluister nie. Die HERE sê toe vir hom: “Aangesien jy die verbond met My verbreek het en ongehoorsaam was aan my opdragte, sal Ek sekerlik die koninkryk van jou afskeur en dit vir een van jou onderdane gee. Ter wille van jou pa, Dawid, sal Ek dit nie in jou leeftyd doen nie, maar wel wanneer jou seun koning geword het. Ek sal ook nie die hele koninkryk afskeur nie. Ter wille van my dienaar Dawid en ter wille van Jerusalem wat Ek uitgekies het, sal Ek wel een stam vir jou seun laat oorbly.”

14

A Kingdom Torn in Two

Through the prophet Ahijah, God told a rising young star in Solomon's administration by the name of Jeroboam that he would be the future king. God would give Jeroboam all but one of the tribes of Israel. After possibly making a preemptive bid for the throne, Jeroboam learned to wait on God's timing. Solomon was not ready to relinquish the throne and tried to kill Jeroboam to keep him from becoming king. Jeroboam fled to Egypt and waited there for an opportunity to make his next move.

After Solomon died, his own tribe of Judah automatically accepted his son Rehoboam as the next king. But much of the population, especially from the other tribes, had grown to resent Solomon's heavy taxation and conscripted labor for his grand projects. As representatives from all of Israel gathered to make Rehoboam king, they let their complaints be known.

REHOBAM WENT TO SHECHEM, for all Israel had gone there to

make him king. When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard this (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), he returned from Egypt. So they sent for Jeroboam, and he and the whole assembly of Israel went to Rehoboam and said to him: “Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labor and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you.”



Rehoboam answered, “Go away for three days and then come back to me.” So the people went away.

Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. “How would you advise me to answer these people?” he asked.

They replied, “If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.”

But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. He asked them, “What is your advice? How should we answer these people who say to me, ‘Lighten the yoke your father put on us’?”

The young men who had grown up with him replied, “These people have said to you, ‘Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.’ Now tell them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.’”

Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, as the king had said, “Come back to me in three days.” The king answered the people harshly. Rejecting the advice given him by the elders, he followed the advice of the young men and said, “My father made your yoke heavy; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.” So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the LORD, to fulfill the word the LORD had spoken to Jeroboam son of

Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

When all Israel saw that the king refused to listen to them, they answered the king:

“What share do we have in David,

what part in Jesse’s son?

To your tents, Israel!

Look after your own house, David!”

So the Israelites went home. But as for the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah, Rehoboam still ruled over them.

Rehoboam retreated to rule Judah (the smaller, southern region), while Jeroboam became king over Israel (the larger, northern region). God had forewarned that the kingdom would become divided because Solomon failed to keep pagan worship outside the realm. Already divided in worship practices, the nation now also became divided in politics, in priesthood, in security and in safety. For two generations, Israel’s army had been the pride of the region, her storerooms filled with precious metals, her people fed, her cities busy and her temple active. Now what would happen to Israel and Judah, split by disputes their leaders could not resolve?

King Rehoboam sent out Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam, however, managed to get into his chariot and escape to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David.

When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered all Judah and the tribe of Benjamin — a hundred and eighty thousand able young men — to go to war against Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon.

But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: “Say to

Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah, to all Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, “This is what the LORD says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.” So they obeyed the word of the LORD and went home again, as the LORD had ordered.

Then Jeroboam fortified Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went out and built up Peniel.

Jeroboam thought to himself, “The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.”

After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin; the people came to worship the one at Bethel and went as far as Dan to worship the other.

Jeroboam built shrines on high places and appointed priests from all sorts of people, even though they were not Levites. He instituted a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the festival held in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. This he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made. And at Bethel he also installed priests at the high places he had made. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month of his own choosing, he offered sacrifices on the altar he had built at Bethel. So he instituted the festival for the Israelites and went up to the altar to make offerings.

By the word of the LORD a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. By the word of the LORD he cried out against the altar: “Altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: ‘A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.’” That same day the man of God gave a sign: “This is the sign the LORD has declared: The altar will be split apart and the ashes on it will be poured out.”

When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, “Seize him!” But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up, so that he could not pull it back. Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the LORD.

Then the king said to the man of God, “Intercede with the LORD your God and pray for me that my hand may be restored.” So the man of God interceded with the LORD, and the king’s hand was restored and became as it was before.

Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways, but once more appointed priests for the high places from all sorts of people. Anyone who wanted to become a priest he consecrated for the high places.

At that time, Abijah son of Jeroboam became ill, and Jeroboam said to his wife, “Go, disguise yourself, so you won’t be recognized as the wife of Jeroboam. Then go to Shiloh. Ahijah the prophet is there — the one who told me I would be king over this people. Take ten loaves of bread with you, some cakes and a jar of honey, and go to him. He will tell you what will happen to the boy.” So Jeroboam’s wife did what he said and went to Ahijah’s house in Shiloh.

Now Ahijah could not see; his sight was gone because of his age. But the LORD had told Ahijah, “Jeroboam’s wife is coming to ask you about her son, for he is ill, and you are to give her such and such an answer. When she arrives, she will pretend to be someone else.”

So when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, “Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why this pretense? I have been sent to you with bad news. Go, tell Jeroboam that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I raised you up from among the people and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes. You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have aroused my anger and turned your back on me.’”

“Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in Israel — slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone. Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country. The LORD has spoken!”

“As for you, go back home. When you set foot in your city, the boy will die. All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the LORD, the God of Israel, has found anything good.

“The LORD will raise up for himself a king over Israel who will cut off the family of Jeroboam. Even now this is beginning to happen. And the LORD will strike Israel, so that it will be like a reed swaying in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that he gave to their ancestors and scatter them beyond the Euphrates River, because they aroused the LORD’S anger by making Asherah poles. And he will give Israel up because of the sins Jeroboam has committed and has caused Israel to commit.”

Then Jeroboam’s wife got up and left and went to Tirzah. As soon as she stepped over the threshold of the house, the boy died. They buried him, and all Israel mourned for him, as the LORD had said through his servant the prophet Ahijah.

Rehoboam son of Solomon was king in Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the LORD had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel in which to put his Name.

Judah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than those who were before them had done. They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. He carried off the treasures of the temple of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made. So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace. Whenever the king went to the LORD'S temple, the guards bore the shields, and afterward they returned them to the guardroom.

There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. And Rehoboam rested with his ancestors and was buried with them in the City of David. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite. And Abijah his son succeeded him as king.

In the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijah became king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem three years. His mother's name was Maakah daughter of Abishalom.

He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been. Nevertheless, for David's sake the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him and by making Jerusalem strong. For David had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD and had not failed to keep any of the LORD'S commands all the days of his life — except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.

There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam throughout Abi-jah's lifetime.

And Abijah rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. And Asa his son succeeded him as king.

In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa became king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem forty-one years. His grandmother's name was Maakah daughter of Abishalom.

Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done. He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his ancestors had made. He even deposed his

grandmother Maakah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive image for the worship of Asherah. Asa cut it down and burned it in the Kidron Valley. Although he did not remove the high places, Asa's heart was fully committed to the LORD all his life. He brought into the temple of the LORD the silver and gold and the articles that he and his father had dedicated.

There was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel throughout their reigns. Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah and fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa king of Judah.

Asa then took all the silver and gold that was left in the treasuries of the LORD'S temple and of his own palace. He entrusted it to his officials and sent them to Ben-Hadad son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, the king of Aram, who was ruling in Damascus. "Let there be a treaty between me and you," he said, "as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you a gift of silver and gold. Now break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel so he will withdraw from me."

Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his forces against the towns of Israel. He conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maakah and all Kinnereth in addition to Naphtali. When Baasha heard this, he stopped building Ramah and withdrew to Tirzah. Then King Asa issued an order to all Judah — no one was exempt — and they carried away from Ramah the stones and timber Baasha had been using there. With them King Asa built up Geba in Benjamin, and also Mizpah.

As for all the other events of Asa's reign, all his achievements, all he did and the cities he built, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? In his old age, however, his feet became diseased. Then Asa rested with his ancestors and was buried with them in the city of his father David. And Jehoshaphat his son succeeded him as king.

After 22 years as king of Israel, Jeroboam also died. Various kings reigned in Israel and Judah. Most of them did evil. Only a few kings were considered "good," like King Asa of Judah, who "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD." Doing right included ridding the

kingdom of idolatry. King Asa went so far as to remove his grandmother, Maakah, from her lofty position of queen mother because of her pagan worship. Asa didn't stop there. He understood that only the Lord God was worthy of worship, and he cleaned the entire land of Judah of its idols.

On the despicable side, Jeroboam's son Nadab "did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following in the ways of his father." A man named Baasha plotted against Nadab and killed the king and Jeroboam's whole family, fulfilling God's prophecy through the prophet Ahijah. But Baasha, "committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit," was no better as a king. Likewise Zimri, who also followed the evil "ways of Jeroboam," killed his predecessor, King Elah, to get onto the throne. But Zimri had failed to calculate his popular support, or lack thereof, and was in power all of seven days before burning himself to death in the palace and leaving the ashes of his discontent to Omri, the people's choice. During his reign Omri made the city of Samaria the capital of the northern kingdom, and "Samaria" also came to signify the entire territory of the northern tribes.

When Omri died, his son Ahab became king of Israel. But the real power in the family was Ahab's infamous wife Jezebel, a powerful woman of iron will and the daughter of a pagan foreign king. Ahab and Jezebel worshiped Baal and hated the prophets of God, of whom Elijah was chief. Elijah became public enemy number one, but God had a fiery confrontation planned to show the people whose side God himself was on.

In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.

In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its

gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the LORD spoken by Joshua son of Nun.

'n Koninkryk in twee geskeur

God het deur die profeet Agija vir 'n jong opkomende ster in Salomo se administrasie met die naam Jerobeam gesê dat hy die volgende koning sou wees. God sou vir Jerobeam al die stamme van Israel gee behalwe een. Nadat hy probeer het om die koningskap oor te neem, het Jerobeam geleer om op die Here se tydsberekening te wag. Salomo was nie gereed om afstand te doen van die troon nie, en het Jerobeam probeer doodmaak om te keer dat hy koning word. Jerobeam het na Egipte gevlug en het daar gewag vir die geleentheid om sy volgende skuif te maak.

Ná Salomo se dood het sy stam van Juda sy seun Rehabeam outomaties as die volgende koning aanvaar. Maar die meeste van die nasie, veral van die ander stamme, het gegrief gevoel oor Salomo se swaar belastings en dwangarbeid vir sy groot projekte. Toe verteenwoordigers van die hele Israel bymekaargekom het om Rehabeam koning te maak, het hulle hulle klagtes bekendgemaak.



Rehabeam het na Sigem toe gegaan waar die hele Israel vergader het om hom tot koning te kroon. Jerobeam seun van Nebat was nog in Egipte waarheen hy vir Salomo gevlug het. Toe hy hiervan hoor, het hy uit Egipte teruggekom. Die leiers van Israel het Jerobeam laat kom en hy het saam met die hele Israel na Rehabeam toe gegaan. "U pa het ons 'n swaar las laat dra," het hulle gesê. "Verminder tog die arbeidslas wat u pa op ons gelê het sodat die juk wat ons dra ligter kan wees. Dan sal ons u onderdane bly."

Rehabeam het geantwoord: "Gee my drie dae en kom dan terug vir my antwoord." Die volk het toe teruggegaan.

Daarna het koning Rehabeam die ouer mense geraadpleeg wat sy pa Salomo van raad bedien het. "Wat beveel julle aan?" vra hy. "Hoe moet ek die mense antwoord?"

Die ouer raadgewers het geantwoord: “As u vandag na die volk luister en hulle tevrede stel met ’n gunstige antwoord, sal hulle altyd u onderdane bly.”

Maar Rehabeam het die advies van die ouer raadsmanne verwerp. Hy vra toe raad by die jonger manne wat saam met hom grootgeword het en nou in sy diens was. “Wat dink julle moet ek hierdie mense antwoord?” vra hy hulle. “Hulle wil hê dat ek die laste wat my pa op hulle gelê het, ligter maak.”

Die jong manne wat saam met hom grootgeword het, het hom geantwoord: “Jy moet soos volg reageer teenoor die mense wat gesê het: ‘U pa het ons ’n swaar las laat dra. Verminder tog die arbeidslas.’ Só moet jy vir hulle sê: ‘My pinkie is dikker as my pa se middellyf. My pa het ’n swaar las op julle gelê; maar ek gaan die las nog swaarder maak! My pa het julle met swepe geslaan; maar ek sal julle met skerpioene teister!’”

Drie dae later het Jerobeam en die hele volk teruggekom volgens die koning se bevel: “Kom oor drie dae terug.” Maar Rehabeam het die volk ’n harde antwoord gegee omdat hy die raad van die ouer manne verwerp het en die volk geantwoord het volgens die raad van die jonger manne: “My pa het ’n swaar las op julle gelê; ek gaan die las nog swaarder maak! My pa het julle met swepe geslaan; maar ek sal julle met skerpioene teister!” Die koning het nie toegegee aan die versoek van die volk nie. Hierdie wending was die werk van die HERE volgens sy boodskap aan Jerobeam seun van Nebat deur die profeet Agija uit Silo.

Toe die Israeliete besef dat die koning hulle versoek verwerp het, het hulle geskreeu:

“Wat het ons aan Dawid en sy koningshuis?

In die seun van Isai het ons geen aandeel nie!

Gaan terug na julle huise toe, Israel!

Sorg julle nou maar vir julleself, huis van Dawid!”

Die volk het toe teruggegaan na hulle huise toe. Rehabeam het bly regeer oor die Israeliete wat in die Judese stede gewoon het.

Rehabeam het oor Juda gaan regeer (die kleiner, suidelike landstreek), terwyl Jerobeam koning oor Israel (die groter, noordelike landstreek) geword het. God het vooraf gewaarsku dat die koninkryk in twee sou skeur omdat Salomo nie afgodsdienste uit sy land gehou het nie. Die land se aanbiddingspraktyke het dit reeds in twee gedeeltes, nou

is ook die politiek, priesterskap, sekuriteit en veiligheid in twee gedeel. Vir twee generasies was Israel se weermag die trots van die landstreek, haar stoorkamers was vol kosbare metale, haar mense het kos gehad, haar stede was besig en haar tempel aktief. Wat sou nou met Israel en Juda gebeur wat klaar verdeel was deur meningsverskille wat die leiers nie kon oplos nie?

Koning Rehabeam stuur toe vir Adoniram wat oor die dwangarbeid was, na Israel toe. Die Israeliete het hom egter met klippe doodgegooi. Koning Rehabeam kon net betyds in sy strydwa kom en na Jerusalem toe vlug. So het die noordelike stamme van Israel teen die koningshuis van Dawid in opstand gekom. Dit is tot vandag toe nog so.

Na die volk van Israel gehoor het dat Jerobeam terug was uit Egipte, het hulle hom na 'n vergadering laat kom en hom koning oor die hele Israel gemaak. Net die stam van Juda het getrou gebly aan die afstammeling van Dawid.

Toe Rehabeam in Jerusalem terugkom, het hy die leer van Juda en Benjamin opgeroep. Daar was 180 000 uitgesoekte soldate wat teen die leer van Israel kon optrek om die koningskap vir hom terug te wen. Maar God het vir Semaja, die man van God, beveel: “Gaan sê vir Rehabeam, die koning van Juda, seun van Salomo, en vir die hele Juda en Benjamin en die res van die volk: ‘Dis wat die HERE sê: Moenie teen jou bloedverwante, die Israeliete, gaan veg nie. Gaan terug huis toe, want wat gebeur het, kom van My af.’” Hulle het die boodskap van die HERE gehoorsaam en terug huis toe gegaan soos die HERE beveel het.

Jerobeam het Sigem in die Efraimsberge herbou en dit sy hoofstad gemaak. Hy het later verhuis en Pniël herbou.

Jerobeam het by homself gedink: “Die koningskap kan maklik weer teruggaan na die koningshuis van Dawid. As hierdie volk aanhou om Jerusalem toe te gaan om daar by die tempel van die HERE te offer, sal hulle weer vertrou kry in koning Rehabeam van Juda. Hulle sal my doodmaak en teruggaan na Rehabeam, die koning van Juda.”

Op advies van sy raadgewers het die koning toe twee goue beelde van kalwers gemaak. Hy sê toe: “Julle het nou lank genoeg Jerusalem toe gegaan, Israel. Hier is die gode wat julle uit Egipte gebring het!” Hy het een kalwerbeeld in Bet-El opgerig en die ander een in Dan. Dit het die volk tot sonde verlei. Die volk het selfs saam in die optog na Dan toe gegaan.

Jerobeam het heiligdomme op die hoogtes gebou, en het mense uit die volk wat nie uit die stam van Levi was nie, as priesters aangestel.

Jerobeam het 'n fees in die middelherfs in Bet-El gehou net soos die een in Juda. In Bet-El het hy op die altaar offers gebring vir die kalwerbeelde wat hy gemaak het. Hy het ook priesters aangestel vir die hoogtes in Bet-El. Op die bepaalde dag in middelherfs het Jerobeam offers gebring op die altaar in Bet-El. Hy het self besluit oor die datum van die fees wat hy vir die Israeliete ingestel het.

Hy het na die altaar gegaan om te offer. Skielik daag daar 'n man van God uit Juda by Bet-El op. Dit was op bevel van die HERE. Hy het daar aangekom net toe Jerobeam by die altaar gaan staan het om te offer. Op bevel van die HERE roep hy toe uit: “Altaar, altaar! Dit is wat die HERE sê: “’n Seun met die naam Josia sal uit die nageslag van Dawid gebore word. Hier op jou sal hy die priesters van die hoogtes offer wat nou wieroekoffers op jou bring. Hier sal mensbene op jou verbrand word.” Die man van God het ook 'n teken aangekondig om sy boodskap te bevestig. Hy het gesê: “Die HERE het hierdie teken gegee: Hierdie altaar sal uitmekaarbreek en die as daarop sal op die grond val.”

Koning Jerobeam was woedend vir die man van God omdat hy teen die altaar gepraat het. Hy het sy hand na die man uitgesteek en gesê: “Gryp hom!” Maar die koning se hand het dadelik styf geword sodat hy dit nie weer kon terugtrek nie. Terselfdertyd het die altaar uitmekaargebreek en die as het op die grond geval. Dit het net so gebeur soos wat die man van God op bevel van die HERE gesê het.

Die koning vra toe vir die man van God: “Asseblief, bid tot die HERE jou God om my hand te herstel!” Die man van God het tot die HERE gebid en die koning se hand het herstel soos tevore.

Maar selfs ten spyte van hierdie gebeurtenis het Jerobeam nie sy bose dinge laat vaar nie. Hy het voortgegaan om sommer uit die volk priesters vir die hoogtes aan te stel. Hy het enigeen wat 'n priester wou wees as priester by die hoogtes aangestel.

In hierdie tyd het Jerobeam se seun Abia baie siek geword. Jerobeam sê toe vir sy vrou: “Vermom jouself sodat niemand jou as Jerobeam se vrou kan herken nie. Gaan dan na die profeet Agija in Silo, die man wat gesê het dat ek koning oor hierdie volk sou word. Vat vir hom tien brode, koeke en 'n kruik vol heuning saam. Hy sal vir jou sê wat met die seun sal gebeur.” Jerobeam se vrou het toe na Agija se huis in Silo gegaan.

Teen hierdie tyd kon hy nie meer sien nie omdat die ouderdom sy oë ingehaal het. Maar die HERE het reeds vir Agija ingelig: “Jerobeam

se vrou kom hiernatoe en sal haar voordoen as iemand anders. Sy sal navraag doen oor haar seun, want hy is baie siek. Antwoord haar soos Ek vir jou sê.”

Toe Agija haar voetstappe by die deur hoor, roep hy: “Kom binne, vrou van Jerobeam! Hoekom gee jy voor dat jy iemand anders is? Ek het slegte nuus vir jou. Gaan sê vir Jerobeam: ‘Dit is wat die HERE, die God van Israel sê: Ek het jou uit die gewone mense geneem en jou heerser van Israel gemaak. Ek het die koningskap afgeskeur van die Dawidshuis en dit vir jou gegee. Maar jy was nie soos my dienaar Dawid wat my bevele gehoorsaam het, My ten volle gedien het en volgens my eise gelewe het nie. Jy het meer kwaad gedoen as almal voor jou. Jy het ander gode gemaak en My met jou goue kalwers uitgetart.

“Omdat jy jou rug op My gedraai het, sal Ek rampe oor jou koningshuis laat kom. Ek sal elke manlike uit die nageslag van Jerobeam uitroei uit Israel, of dit slawe of vry mense is. Ek sal jou koningshuis verbrand soos ’n mens rommel verbrand totdat daar niks oor is nie. Die honde sal elkeen wat aan Jerobeam behoort en wat in die stad sterf, opvreet, en dié wat in die veld sterf, sal die roofvoëls verslind. Dit sal gebeur, want die HERE het dit gesê.’

“Jy kan nou maar huis toe gaan. Wanneer jy die stad binnekom, sal die kind sterf. Die hele Israel sal oor hom rou en hom begrawe. Hy is die enigste van die familie van Jerobeam wat begrawe sal word, want hierdie kind is die enigste een in die familie van Jerobeam in wie die HERE, die God van Israel, iets goeds gekry het.

“Die HERE sal vir Hom ’n koning oor Israel aanstel wat die hele familie van Jerobeam sal uitwis. Dit sal binnekort, sonder versuim, gebeur! Dan sal die HERE Israel tref soos vloedwater ’n riet tref. Hy sal die mense van Israel uitruk uit hierdie goeie land wat Hy vir hulle voorouers gegee het en hulle verstrooi tot anderkant die Eufraatrivier, want hulle het die HERE uitgetart met pale wat aan Asjera gewy was. Hy sal Israel prysgee oor die sonde van Jerobeam, en omdat hy die hele Israel laat sondig het.”

Jerobeam se vrou het na Tirsa toe teruggegaan. Toe sy oor die paleis se drumpel stap, het die kind gesterf. Hulle het hom begrawe en die hele Israel het oor hom gerou soos die HERE deur Agija die profeet gesê het.

Intussen het Rehabeam oor Juda regeer. Hy was 41 jaar oud toe hy koning geword het, en hy was sewentien jaar lank koning in Jerusalem, die stad wat die HERE uit al die stamme van Israel gekies

het as die plek waar sy Naam vereer moet word.

Gedurende die regering van Rehabeam het die Judeërs gedoen wat verkeerd was vir die HERE. Met hulle sondes het hulle die HERE meer getart as wat hulle voorouers gedoen het. Hulle het op elke hoë heuwel en onder elke groen boom hoogtes gebou en klippilare en pale gewy aan Asjera opgerig. Daar was ook manlike tempelprostitute in die land. Die Judeërs het dieselfde afskuwelike praktyke beoefen as die heidennasies wat die HERE ter wille van die Israeliete uit die land verdryf het.

In die vyfde regeringsjaar van koning Rehabeam het koning Sisak van Egipte gekom en Jerusalem aangeval. Hy het die tempel van die HERE en die koninklike paleis geplunder. Hy het alles gevat, selfs die goue skilde wat Salomo laat maak het. Daarna het Rehabeam skilde van brons gemaak om dit te vervang, en het dit in die sorg van die hoof van die lyfwagte by die ingang van die paleis geplaas. Elke keer wanneer die koning na die tempel van die HERE gegaan het, het die wagte die skilde saamgedra en dit daarna weer in die wagte se kamer gebêre.

Daar was voortdurend oorlog tussen Rehabeam en Jerobeam. Toe Rehabeam sterf, is hy in die familiegraf in die Dawidstad begrawe. Sy ma was Naäma, 'n Ammonitiese vrou. Sy seun Abia het hom as koning opgevolg.

In die agtiende regeringsjaar van Jerobeam seun van Nebat het Abia koning van Juda geword. Hy het drie jaar in Jerusalem regeer. Sy ma was Maäka, dogter van Abisalom.

Hy het dieselfde sondes gepleeg as sy pa voor hom. Hy het nie die HERE sy God met oorgawe gedien soos sy voorsa Dawid nie. Maar ter wille van Dawid het die HERE sy God sy koningshuis in Jerusalem laat voortbestaan deur vir hom 'n seun te gee om ná hom in Jerusalem te regeer en die stad in stand te hou. Dit was so omdat Dawid gedoen het wat die HERE se goedkeuring geniet het en die voorskrifte van die HERE sy lewe lank gehoorsaam het, behalwe in die geval van Urija die Hetiet.

Daar was voortdurend oorlog tussen Rehabeam en Jerobeam, al die dae van Rehabeam se lewe.

Toe Abia sterf, is hy in die Dawidstad begrawe. Sy seun Asa het hom as koning opgevolg.

Asa het in die twintigste regeringsjaar van Jerobeam van Israel

koning van Juda geword. Hy het 41 jaar lank in Jerusalem regeer. Sy ma was Maäka, dogter van Abisalom.

Asa het gedoen wat die HERE se goedkeuring geniet het net soos sy voorvader Dawid. Hy het die tempelprostitute uit die land verban en al die afgode wat sy voorgangers gemaak het, weggeneem. Hy het selfs sy ma Maäka onthef van haar posisie as koninginmoeder omdat sy 'n afskuwelike beeld ter ere van Asjera laat maak het. Hy het dit stukkend gekap en in die Kidrondal verbrand. Hoewel die hoogtes nie verwyder is nie, het Asa nogtans gedurende sy hele lewe aan die HERE getrou gebly. Hy het ook die silwer en goue offergereedskap wat hy en sy pa aan God gewy het, na die tempel toe gebring.

Daar was voortdurend oorlog tussen Asa en koning Baesa van Israel. Koning Baesa van Israel het Juda binnegeval en Rama versterk om sodoende te verhoed dat enigiemand koning Asa van Juda se gebied kon binnekom of verlaat. Asa het toe die silwer en goud wat nog in die skatkamers van die HERE se tempel en die koninklike paleis was, geneem. Hy het amptenare gestuur om dit na Ben-Hadad seun van Tabrimmon en kleinseun van Gesjon, die koning van Aram in Damaskus, weg te vat. Hy het hom laat weet: “Laat ons 'n ooreenkoms sluit soos wat daar tussen u pa en my pa was. Kyk, ek stuur vir u 'n geskenk van silwer en goud. Verbreek tog u ooreenkoms met koning Baesa van Israel sodat hy van my af kan wegtrek.”

Ben-Hadad het na Asa se versoek geluister. Hy het sy leëaanvoerders gestuur om die stede van Israel aan te val. Hulle het die dorpe Ijon, Dan, Abel-Bet-Maäka en die hele Gennesaret en ook die hele gebied van Naftali verower. Toe Baesa van Israel hoor wat besig is om te gebeur, het hy die bouwerk by Rama laat staan en in Tirsa gaan woon. Daarna het koning Asa die hele Juda opgeroep. Elkeen sonder uitsondering moes help om die klippe en hout wat Baesa vir die bouwerk in Rama gebruik het, weg te dra. Asa het hierdie boumateriaal gebruik vir bouwerk by Geba in Benjamin en by Mispa.

Die ander gebeurtenisse tydens Asa se regering, al sy dapper dade, alles wat hy gedoen het, en die stede wat hy gebou het, is opgeteken in *Die boek van die handeling van die konings van Juda*. In sy ouderdom het hy egter 'n siekte aan sy voete opgedoen. Toe Asa sterf, is hy in die familiegraf in die Dawidstad begrawe. Sy seun Josafat het hom as koning opgevolg.

Ná 22 jaar as koning is Jerobeam ook dood. Verskeie konings het in Israel en Juda regeer. Die meeste van hulle het verkeerd gedoen in die

oë van die Here. Slegs 'n handjievol is as “goed” beskou, soos koning Asa van Juda, wat gedoen het wat reg was in die oë van die Here. Hy het onder andere alle afgode uit die land verwyder. Koning Asa het selfs sy ma Maäka van haar verhewe posisie as koninginmoeder verwyder as gevolg van haar afgodsaanbidding. Asa het ook nie daar opgehou nie. Hy het geweet net die Here God is waardig om aanbid te word en hy het alle afgode uit die land Juda verwyder.

Jerobeam se seun Nadab het gedoen wat verkeerd was in die oë van die Here, deur te volg in sy pa se voetspore. 'n Man met die naam Baesa het 'n komplot teen Nadab gesmee en het die koning en Jerobeam se hele familie doodgemaak en sodoende die Here se profesie deur die profeet Agija waar gemaak. Maar Baesa, wat dieselfde sonde gedoen het as wat Jerobeam vir Israel laat doen het, was nie 'n beter koning nie. Ook Simri, wat ook die bose weë van Jerobeam gevolg het, het sy voorganger, koning Ela, vermoor om die kroon te kry. Maar Simri het sy eie gewildheid oorskat en het net sewe dae regeer voordat hy homself in die paleis verbrand het en die as van sy misnoeë aan Omri, die mense se keuse, nagelaat het. Gedurende sy heerskappy het Omri die stad Samaria die hoofstad van die noordelike koninkryk gemaak, en “Samaria” het die hele gebied van die noordelike stamme aangedui.

Toe Omri dood is, het sy seun Agab koning van Israel geword. Maar die ware mag van die familie was Agab se berugte vrou, Isebel, 'n magtige vrou van staal en die dogter van 'n heidense koning. Agab en Isebel het Baäl aanbid en het die profete van God, van wie Elia die hoof was, gehaat. Elia het hulle grootste vyand geword, maar God het 'n vurige konfrontasie beplan om vir die mense te wys aan wie se kant God self was.

Agab seun van Omri het in die 38ste regeringsjaar van koning Asa van Juda koning geword van Israel. Hy het 22 jaar lank in Samaria regeer. Agab het egter gedoen wat verkeerd was vir die HERE, selfs meer as enige van die konings voor hom. Asof dit nie genoeg was nie, het hy met Isebel, die dogter van koning Etbaäl van die Sidoniërs, getrou en Baäl begin dien en aanbid. Eers het hy 'n tempel en 'n altaar vir Baäl in Samaria gebou. Daarna het hy 'n paal wat aan Asjera gewy is, opgerig. Hy het die HERE die God van Israel meer uitgetart as al die konings van Israel voor hom.

Gedurende sy regering het Giël uit Bet-El die stad Jerigo herbou. Toe hy die fundamente gelê het, het sy oudste seun Abiram gesterf. Toe hy die poortdeure gehang het, het sy jongste seun, Segub, gesterf.

Dit het gebeur net soos die woord van die HERE deur Josua seun van Nun lank tevore oor Jerigo gesê het.

15

God's Messengers

NOW ELIJAH THE TISHBITE, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.”

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: “Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there.”

So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

After a long time, in the third year, the word of the LORD came to Elijah: “Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.” So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab.

When he saw Elijah, he said to him, “Is that you, you troubler of Israel?”



“I have not made trouble for Israel,” Elijah replied. “But you and your father’s family have. You have abandoned the LORD’S commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.”

But the people said nothing.

Then Elijah said to them, “I am the only one of the LORD’S prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal’s prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire — he is God.”

Then all the people said, “What you say is good.”

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire.” So they took the bull given them and prepared it.

Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. “Baal, answer us!” they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.

At noon Elijah began to taunt them. “Shout louder!” he said. “Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.” So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come here to me.” They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the LORD, which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Your name shall be Israel.” With the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs¹ of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid

it on the wood. Then he said to them, “Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood.”

“Do it again,” he said, and they did it again.

“Do it a third time,” he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”

Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The LORD — he is God! The LORD — he is God!”

Then Elijah commanded them, “Seize the prophets of Baal. Don’t let anyone get away!” They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.

And Elijah said to Ahab, “Go, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain.” So Ahab went off to eat and drink, but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees.

“Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked.

“There is nothing there,” he said.

Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.”

The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man’s hand is rising from the sea.”

So Elijah said, “Go and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go

down before the rain stops you.””

Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain started falling and Ahab rode off to Jezreel. The power of the LORD came on Elijah and, tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

Jezebel was not one to count her losses. When Ahab's own will to fight was exhausted, he could count on Jezebel to keep charging. Her will to win overcame any doubts she might have had about the failure on Mount Carmel.

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them.”

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, “Get up and eat.” He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the LORD came to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

The LORD said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

He replied, “I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.”

The LORD said to him, “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel — all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,” he said, “and then I will come with you.”

“Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?”

So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant.

King Ahab constantly vacillated, appearing kingly one day, then floundering the next. He spared the life of his archenemy Ben-Hadad

when God delivered the king of Aram into Ahab's hand in battle. Yet Ahab took the life of his own subject, Naboth, in order to steal Naboth's vineyard. In the end, Ahab died in battle disguised as a foot soldier, hit by a random arrow. His son Aha-ziah could not improve on his parents' dismal record, so he also joined the annals of the wicked kings and died without a successor. In Judah, Asa's son Jehoshaphat followed God, survived enemies' threats, and the southern kingdom began to prosper.

Meanwhile, Elijah's time had come to an end. There was never a grander exit than his, or more compelling proof to his successor Elisha that the mantle of divine power had now passed to him.

When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; the LORD has sent me to Bethel."

But Elisha said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

Fifty men from the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"

"Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

"You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours — otherwise, it will not."

As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.

Elisha then picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and struck the water with it. "Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.

The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha." And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

Elijah was gone. Elisha was left to carry on the work, and his dramatic miracles made it clear that his God was one of unspeakable power and glory. In one instance, Elisha purified a spring to provide fresh water to an entire town. Another time, through Elisha's intervention, a poor widow and her sons were saved from financial ruin and slavery by a bottomless jar of oil. Elisha appreciated the small favors that lightened a prophet's stressful load. On one occasion he was offered a meal by a wealthy woman from Shunem, who eventually suggested to her husband that they offer Elisha a place to stay whenever he came to their area. Grateful for her friendship and kindness, Elisha prayed to God for the woman, who had no son.

One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there. He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"

She replied, "I have a home among my own people."

"What can be done for her?" Elisha asked.

Gehazi said, "She has no son, and her husband is old."

Then Elisha said, "Call her." So he called her, and she stood in the doorway. "About this time next year," Elisha said, "you will hold a son in your arms."

"No, my lord!" she objected. "Please, man of God, don't mislead your servant!"

But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

Later, when the child was older, he grew ill. Imagine his mother's distress when the child died in her arms. Her first move was to travel to see Elisha.

When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why."

"Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, 'Don't raise my hopes'?"

Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. Don't greet anyone you meet, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face."

But the child's mother said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her.

Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, "The boy has not awakened."

When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch. He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the LORD. Then he got on the bed and lay on the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out on him, the boy's body grew warm. Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out on him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite." And he did. When she came, he said, "Take your son." She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.

Among the many notable deeds of Elisha, one of the most famous began with the testimony of a young girl from Israel. Her name is unknown, but her plight is not uncommon. She was captured by enemy raiders from Aram and then lived as a slave in the household

of the commander of their army. This man, Naaman, had leprosy. The Israelite girl compassionately urged him to seek healing from the prophet of her God. In faith born of desperation, Naaman sought out Elisha and received from the prophet surprising instructions: go and wash in the Jordan River. When Naaman complied, he was healed completely. But when Gehazi, Elisha's servant, tried to extract a small fee for this miracle, he became leprous for his greed.

Neither the prophet of God nor the words he spoke were to be taken lightly or treated casually. The king of Aram discovered this fact for himself.

Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place."

The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there." So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

"None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

"Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.

"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see."

Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike this army with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria.

After they entered the city, Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?"

"Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master." So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

Before Elisha died, he ordered that Jehu be anointed king of Israel. This same Jehu, filled with holy zeal, marched a regiment to the home of Jezebel in the town of Jezreel. Fearlessly Jehu confronted her, calling for her servants to throw her from the window. So the "cursed woman" died that day, and later, all of Ahab's offspring were killed. These events happened in fulfillment of Elijah's prophetic judgment years earlier. Then Jehu turned his sword on ministers of the pagan god Baal, for surely the most subtle and pernicious threats lay in the subversion of worship from the true God. The Baal altars had to be destroyed before Israel could be secure.

Many kings came and went in Israel and Judah. Some achieved godly reforms; others made a mess of what they inherited. Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, lost his army but kept the nation together. Around 797 BC, Elisha made one more pronouncement against the Arameans, responding to the pleas of a desperate King Jehoash. Once the king

was assured of victory, Elisha died.

Jeroboam II took the reins and secured Israel's borders, but he never guarded Israel's soul. The worship of false gods and idol-making businesses flourished during his regime. During this prosperous period, a prophet arose with a stirring message of justice and judgment.

The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa — the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel.

He said:

Hear this word, people of Israel, the word the LORD has spoken against you — against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt:

“You only have I chosen

of all the families of the earth;

therefore I will punish you

for all your sins.”

Proclaim to the fortresses of Ashdod

and to the fortresses of Egypt:

“Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria;

see the great unrest within her

and the oppression among her people.”

“They do not know how to do right,” declares the LORD,

“who store up in their fortresses

what they have plundered and looted.”

Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“An enemy will overrun your land,
pull down your strongholds
and plunder your fortresses.”

The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his holiness:

“The time will surely come
when you will be taken away with hooks,
the last of you with fishhooks.

You will each go straight out
through breaches in the wall,
and you will be cast out toward Harmon,”
declares the LORD.

“I gave you empty stomachs in every city
and lack of bread in every town,
yet you have not returned to me,”
declares the LORD.

“I sent plagues among you
as I did to Egypt.

I killed your young men with the sword,
along with your captured horses.

I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps,
yet you have not returned to me,”

declares the LORD.

“Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel,
and because I will do this to you, Israel,
prepare to meet your God.”

Seek the LORD and live,
or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire;
it will devour them.

Seek good, not evil,
that you may live.

Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you,
just as you say he is.

Hate evil, love good;
maintain justice in the courts.

Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy
on the remnant of Joseph.

“Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD
are on the sinful kingdom.

I will destroy it
from the face of the earth.

Yet I will not totally destroy

the descendants of Jacob,”

declares the LORD.

Hosea followed as a prophet in Israel. He poured out his heart, pleading with a nation that refused to love a faithful God. Hosea warned the northern kingdom that if they did not repent and turn back to God, they would face serious consequences.

Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites,

because the LORD has a charge to bring

against you who live in the land:

“There is no faithfulness, no love,

no acknowledgment of God in the land.

There is only cursing,² lying and murder,

stealing and adultery;

they break all bounds,

and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

“Their deeds do not permit them

to return to their God.

A spirit of prostitution is in their heart;

they do not acknowledge the LORD.

“They are unfaithful to the LORD;

they give birth to illegitimate children.

When they celebrate their New Moon feasts,

he will devour their fields.

“For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
like a great lion to Judah.

I will tear them to pieces and go away;

I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them.

Then I will return to my lair

until they have borne their guilt

and seek my face —

in their misery

they will earnestly seek me.”

“Now he will remember their wickedness

and punish their sins:

They will return to Egypt.

Israel has forgotten their Maker

and built palaces;

Judah has fortified many towns.

But I will send fire on their cities

that will consume their fortresses.”

The days of punishment are coming,

the days of reckoning are at hand.

Let Israel know this.

Because your sins are so many
and your hostility so great,
the prophet is considered a fool,
the inspired person a maniac.
Return, Israel, to the LORD your God.

Your sins have been your downfall!

Take words with you
and return to the LORD.

Say to him:

“Forgive all our sins
and receive us graciously,
that we may offer the fruit of our lips.”

Though the prophets warned the people, the northern kingdom of Israel didn't listen. They hardened their hearts and continued to ignore God's pleas to return to his ways. The kings of Israel led the people into spiritual and social chaos. Between Jeroboam II and Hoshea came a series of five other kings, noted for doing “evil in the eyes of the LORD.” All of them came into power and/or had their reigns ended through assassination.

How long would the people turn their back on God?

1 Two seahs: That is, probably about 24 pounds or about 11 kilograms.

2 Cursing: That is, to pronounce a curse on.

God se boodskappers

Elia die Tisbiet het hom tydelik in Gilead gevestig. Hy het vir Agab gesê: “So seker as wat die HERE die God van Israel leef, die God wat ek dien, in die volgende aantal jare sal daar geen dou of reën val nie behalwe wanneer ek so sê.”

Toe sê die HERE vir Elia: “Gaan ooswaarts van hier en kruip weg by die Kritspruit, net anderkant die Jordaanrivier. Jy kan uit die spruit water drink en Ek sal die kraaie beveel om vir jou kos te bring.”

Elia het gemaak soos die HERE hom beveel het en by Kritspruit anderkant die Jordaanrivier gaan weggroep. Die kraaie het soggens en saans vir hom brood en vleis gebring, en hy het water uit die spruit gedrink.

Na 'n lang tyd, tydens die derde jaar van droogte, sê die HERE vir Elia: “Gaan na koning Agab toe en sê vir hom Ek sal dit binnekort laat reën.” Elia het na Agab toe gegaan. Intussen het die hongersnood in Samaria toegeneem.



“Is dit jy, jou moeilikheidmaker in Israel?” vra Agab toe hy hom sien.

“Ek het geen moeilikheid vir Israel gemaak nie,” antwoord Elia. “Jy en jou familie is die moeilikheidmakers, want julle het nie die gebooie van die HERE gehoorsaam nie en eerder die Baäls aanbid. Maar laat die volk van Israel op Karmelberg bymekaarkom. Ook die 450 profete van Baäl en die 400 profete van Asjera wat Isebel onderhou, moet daar wees.”

Agab het toe gestuur en die hele volk en die profete op Karmelberg bymekaar laat kom. Elia het voor hulle gaan staan en gesê: “Hoe lank gaan julle nog weier om kant te kies? As die HERE God is, volg Hom! Maar as dit Baäl is, volg hóm!”

Die volk het egter niks geantwoord nie.

Toe sê Elia vir die volk: “Ek is die enigste profeet van die HERE wat nog oor is, terwyl daar 450 profete van Baäl is. Bring nou twee bulle. Die profete van Baäl kan een kies, hom in stukke opsny en bo-op die hout op die altaar neersit. Hulle moet dit egter nie aan die brand steek nie. Ek sal die ander bul opsny en bo-op die hout op die altaar neersit. Ek sal dit ook nie aan die brand steek nie. Dan moet julle julle god aanroep en ek sal die HERE aanroep. Die een wat met vuur antwoord, is die ware God!”

Die hele volk het met hierdie reëling saamgestem.

Elia sê toe vir die profete van Baäl: “Kies julle nou ’n bul en kry dit gereed, want daar is baie van julle. Roep dan julle god aan, maar moenie die vuur aan die brand steek nie.” Hulle het een van die bulle gekies en gereed gekry.

Toe roep hulle Baäl aan. Hulle het die hele oggend geroep: “O Baäl, antwoord ons!” Daar was egter geen reaksie nie en niemand het geantwoord nie. Hulle het selfs al om die altaar wat hulle gemaak het, gedans.

Teen die middag het Elia hulle begin spot. “Julle moet nog harder roep,” spot hy. “Hy is mos ’n god! Dalk is hy ingedagte, of dalk het hy ’n draaitjie gaan loop. Miskien is hy weg op reis, of slaap hy en moet wakker gemaak word!” Hulle het toe al harder geroep en – soos hulle gebruik was – hulleself met messe en swaarde stukkend gesny totdat die bloed geloop het. Hulle het die hele namiddag so aangehou totdat die tyd vir die aandoffer aangebreek het. Maar steeds was daar geen geluid nie, geen antwoord nie, niemand wat gereageer het nie.

Toe roep Elia die volk: “Kom nader!” Hulle het almal rondom hom kom staan terwyl hy die altaar van die HERE wat afgebreek was, herstel het. Hy het twaalf klippe gevat, een vir elke stam van die nageslag van Jakob vir wie die HERE gesê het: “Jou naam sal Israel wees.” Hy het die klippe gebruik om die vervalle altaar van die HERE reg te maak. Daarna grawe hy ’n sloot rondom die altaar. Dit was groot genoeg om ongeveer vyftien liter te hou. Hy het hout op die altaar gesit, die bul in stukke gesny en dit op die hout neergelê. Toe beveel hy: “Vat vier groot waterkruike, maak hulle vol water en gooi dit uit oor die offer en die hout.”

Nadat hulle dit gedoen het, sê hy: “Doen dit weer!”

Hulle maak toe so, maar hy sê: “Doen dit ’n derde keer!” Hulle het weer gemaak soos hy gesê het. Die water het oor die altaar gestroom en selfs die sloot rondom vol water gemaak.

Teen die tyd van die aandoffer het die profeet Elia na die altaar toe gegaan en gebid: “HERE, God van Abraham, Isak en Israel, wys tog vandag dat U God is in Israel en dat ek u dienaar is wat alles op u bevel gedoen het. HERE, antwoord my! Antwoord my sodat hierdie volk kan erken dat U, HERE, God is en dat dit U is wat hulle weer na U toe laat omdraai.”

Onmiddellik het daar vuur van die HERE gekom en die offer verbrand, asook die hout, die klippe en die grond. Dit het selfs die water in die sloot opgedroog! Toe die volk dit sien, val hulle op die grond en roep uit: “Die HERE is God! Die HERE is God!”

Elia beveel hulle toe: “Gryp die profete van Baäl. Moenie dat ’n enkele een van hulle wegkom nie!” Die volk het hulle gegryp en Elia het hulle na die Kisonspruit laat afneem. Hy het hulle daar doodgemaak.

Elia sê toe vir Agab: “Gaan eet en drink, want ek hoor die gedruis van groot reën!” Agab het toe gaan eet en drink, maar Elia het tot op die top van Karmelberg geklim. Daar het hy met sy kop tussen sy knieë op die grond neergebuig.

Hy sê toe vir sy dienaar: “Gaan kyk uit oor die see.”

Die dienaar het gekyk, na Elia toe teruggekom en gesê: “Ek sien niks nie.”

Elia sê vir hom: “Gaan kyk weer!” Sewe keer het Elia hom gestuur.

Die sewende keer kom sê die dienaar: “Ek sien ’n klein wolkie so groot soos ’n man se hand wat uit die see opkom.”

Toe sê Elia: “Maak gou! Gaan sê vir Agab: ‘Span jou wa in en gaan af na jou huis toe anders sal die reën jou vaskeer!’”

Spoedig was die lug donker van onweerswolke. ’n Sterk wind het ’n groot reënstorm gebring. Agab het dadelik na Jisreël toe vertrek. Die HERE het Elia krag gegee. Hy het sy gordel vasgemaak en toe voor Agab se wa uit gehardloop tot by Jisreël.

Isebel het nooit opgegee nie. Wanneer Agab moed opgegee het in ’n geveg kon hy altyd op Isebel vertrou om die stryd vir hom op te neem. Haar wil om te wen, het enige twyfel oor die mislukking op Karmelberg uit die weg geruim.

Agab het vir Isebel alles vertel wat Elia gedoen het, en dat hy die profete van Baäl doodgemaak het. Toe stuur Isebel vir Elia ’n boodskap: “Mag die gode my met die dood straf as ek nie teen môre hierdie tyd jou lewe neem soos jy met die profete gemaak het nie.”

Elia het baie bang geword en vir sy lewe gevlug. Hy het na Berseba,

'n dorp in Juda, gegaan en sy dienaar daar agtergelaat. Hy self het die woestyn 'n dagreis ver binne gegaan. Hy het toe onder 'n besembos gaan sit en gewens dat hy liewer maar moet sterf. "Ek het nou genoeg gehad, HERE," het hy gesê. "Neem nou maar my lewe, want ek is niks beter as my voorouers nie." Hy het gaan lê en onder die besembos aan die slaap geraak. Maar 'n engel het hom wakker geskud en vir hom gesê: "Staan op en eet!" Hy kyk op en dáár sien hy by sy kop 'n roosterkoek wat op warm klippe gebak is en 'n kruik vol water. Hy het geëet en gedrink en weer gaan lê.

Die engel het weer gekom, aan hom geskud en gesê: "Staan op en eet weer, anders sal die pad vir jou te lank wees." Hy het toe opgestaan, geëet en gedrink. Die kos het hom genoeg krag gegee sodat hy 40 dae en 40 nagte lank tot by Horeb, die berg van God, kon loop. Daar het hy by 'n grot ingegaan en die nag daar deurgebring.

Maar die HERE het met hom gepraat: "Wat maak jy hier, Elia?"

Elia antwoord: "Ek het U met toewyding gedien, HERE God Almagtig. Maar die Israeliete het die verbond met U verbreek, u altare afgebreek en u profete doodgemaak. Net ek alleen het oorgebly, en nou probeer hulle my ook doodmaak."

"Kom buitekant toe en gaan staan voor My by die berg," sê die HERE vir hom.

Terwyl Elia daar staan, het die HERE by hom verbygegaan en 'n geweldige rukwind het die berg uitmekaargeruk en die rotse gebreek voor die HERE. Tog was die HERE nie in die wind nie. Na die wind was daar 'n aardbewing, maar die HERE was nie in die aardbewing nie. Na die aardbewing was daar 'n vuur, maar die HERE was nie in die vuur nie. Na die vuur was daar die geluid van 'n sagte gesuis. Toe Elia dit hoor, het hy sy gesig met sy mantel toegemaak. Hy het by die ingang van die grot gaan staan.

'n Stem het gesê: "Wat maak jy hier, Elia?"

Hy het weer geantwoord: "Ek het U met toewyding gedien, HERE God Almagtig. Maar die Israeliete het die verbond met U verbreek, u altare afgebreek en al u profete doodgemaak. Net ek alleen het oorgebly, en nou probeer hulle my ook doodmaak."

Toe sê die HERE vir hom: "Draai net hier om en gaan na die woestyn van Damaskus. Wanneer jy daar aankom, moet jy Gasael salf tot koning van Aram. Dan moet jy Jehu seun van Nimsi salf tot koning oor Israel. Jy moet ook Elisa seun van Safat uit Abel-Megola salf om jou as my profeet op te volg. Dan sal sake só verloop: Die een wat Gasael se swaard ontvlug, sal Jehu doodmaak; en die een wat Jehu se

swaard ontvlug, sal Elisa doodmaak. Nogtans sal Ek die 7 000 in Israel laat oorbly wat nie voor Baäl gebuig en hom vereer het nie.”

Elia het van daar af vertrek en Elisa seun van Safat teëgekom waar hy besig was om met twaalf spanne van twee osse elk ’n landery om te ploeg. Hy was besig om met die twaalfde span te ploeg. Elia het na hom toe geloop en sy mantel oor sy skouers gegooi. Elisa het die osse net daar laat staan en agter Elia aangehardloop. Hy sê vir hom: “Laat ek tog net my pa en ma groet, dan sal ek saam met u gaan.”

Elia antwoord hom: “Gaan maar! Ek staan nie in jou pad nie!”

Elisa het toe teruggegaan en twee osse geslag. Hy het die jukke opgekap vir brandhout en die vleis gebraai. Hy het die vleis gegee aan die ander wat saam met hom geploeg het en hulle het geëet. Daarna het hy saam met Elia gegaan en sy volgeling geword.

Koning Agab was baie wisselvallig. Die een dag het hy baie koninklik voorgekom en die volgende dag weer sukkelend. Hy het sy aartsvyand Ben-Hadad se lewe gespaar toe God die koning van Aram tydens ’n geveg in Agab se hande oorgegee het. Tog het Agab die lewe van sy eie onderdaan Nabot geneem om Nabot se wingerd in die hande te kry. Aan die einde is Agab, geklee as ’n voetsoldaat, in ’n geveg dood toe ’n dwaalpyl hom getref het. Sy seun Ahasia was nie veel beter as sy ouers nie; daarom het hy ook in die anale van die slegte konings beland en sonder ’n opvolger gesterf. In Juda het Asa se seun Josafat vir God gevolg, vyandelike bedreigings oorleef en die Suidryk het floreer.

Intussen het Elia se tyd gekom en gegaan. Daar was nog nooit ’n grootser uittog as syne nie, of meer oortuigende bewyse vir die opvolger Elisa dat die mantel van goddelike krag nou na hom oorgedra is nie.

Die tyd het aangebreek dat die HERE vir Elia in ’n stormwind na die hemel toe sou opneem. Elia en Elisa was op pad van Gilgal af. Elia sê toe vir Elisa: “Bly hier, want die HERE stuur my na Bet-El toe.”

Maar Elisa antwoord hom: “So seker as die HERE leef en u leef, ek sal u nie alleen laat gaan nie!” Hulle het toe saam na Bet-El toe gegaan.

Uit die groep profete het 50 mans ook saamgegaan en op ’n afstand, teenoor die plek waar Elia en Elisa by die Jordaanrivier was, gaan staan. Elia het sy mantel gevat, dit opgerol en die water daarmee geslaan. Die water het weerskante toe verdeel sodat die twee

droogvoets deur die rivier kon gaan.

Toe hulle oorkant aankom, sê Elia vir Elisa: “Wat kan ek vir jou doen voordat ek van jou weggeneem word?”

“Laat my asseblief ’n dubbele erfgenaamsdeel van u gees ontvang,” antwoord Elisa.

“Jy vra my ’n moeilike saak,” antwoord Elia. “As jy sien hoe ek van jou af weggeneem word, sal jy dit ontvang. As jy my nie sien nie, sal dit nie gebeur nie.”

Terwyl hulle nog so aanstap en gesels, verskyn daar skielik ’n wa van vuur, getrek deur perde van vuur. Dit het hulle van mekaar geskei. Elia is in ’n stormwind opgeneem na die hemel toe. Toe Elisa dit sien, roep hy uit: “My vader! My vader! Die strydwa en perderuiters van Israel!” Toe Elisa hom nie meer kon sien nie, het hy sy eie klere gevat en in twee geskeur.

Maar Elia se mantel het afgeval en Elisa het dit opgetel. Toe gaan hy terug en gaan staan by die wal van die Jordaanrivier. Hy het Elia se mantel wat afgeval het, gevat, daarmee op die water geslaan en uitgeroep: “Waar is die HERE, die God van Elia, ja, Hy?” Toe hy die water slaan, het dit weerskante toe verdeel sodat hy kon deurgaen.

Die groep profete van Jerigo het oorkant gestaan en gesien wat gebeur het. Hulle sê toe: “Elisa is Elia se opvolger!” Hulle het hom tegemoetgegaan en voor hom gebuig.

Elia was weg. Elisa het agtergebly om die werk voort te sit, en sy dramatiese wonderwerke het dit duidelik gemaak dat sy God oor onbeskryflike mag en glorie beskik. In een geval het Elisa ’n fontein skoongemaak sodat die hele dorpie vars water kon hê. ’n Ander keer is ’n arm weduwee en haar seuns deur Elisa se ingrype gered van finansiële ondergang en slawerny deur ’n bodemlose oliekrui. Elisa het die klein gunsies waardeur wat ’n stresvolle las verlig het. Op ’n ander keer het ’n ryk vrou van Sunem hom ’n ete aangebied en later aan haar man voorgestel dat hulle vir Elisa ’n plek gee om te bly wanneer hy na hulle omgewing kom. Dankbaar vir haar vriendskap en vriendelikheid het Elisa tot God gebid vir die vrou wat nie ’n seun gehad het nie.

Eendag kom Elisa weer daar aan en kon na die dakkamer toe gaan om daar te rus. Hy sê toe vir sy dienaar Gehasi: “Gaan roep die Sunamitiese vrou.” Toe sy daar aankom, sê Elisa vir Gehasi: “Sê vir haar: ‘Ons waardeur al die moeite wat jy vir ons gedoen het. Maar wat kan ons vir jou doen? Moet ek dalk ’n goeie woordjie vir jou by die

koning doen, of dalk by die hoof van die leër?”

“Nee,” antwoord sy. “Ek is gelukkig tussen my mense wat vir my omgee.”

Elisa vra: “Is daar nie tog iets wat ons vir haar kan doen nie?”

Gehasi sê toe: “Sy het nie ’n seun nie en haar man is al oud.”

“Gaan roep haar weer,” sê Elisa vir hom. Toe die vrou terugkom, sê Elisa vir haar terwyl sy in die deur staan: “Volgende jaar hierdie tyd sal jy ’n seun in jou arms vashou!”

“Nee, Meneer!” maak sy beswaar. “Asseblief, man van God, moenie vir my onwaarhede vertel nie.”

Maar die vrou hét swanger geword. ’n Jaar later het sy ’n seun in die wêreld gebring net soos Elisa vir haar gesê het.

Later, toe die kind ouer was, het hy siek geword. Dink net hoe hartseer die ma was toe haar kind in haar arms dood is. Sy het heel eerste vir Elisa gaan sien.

Maar toe sy by die man van God op die berg kom, val sy op die grond voor hom en gryp sy voete. Gehasi probeer om haar weg te stoot, maar die man van God sê: “Laat haar met rus! Sy is diep bedroef en die HERE het dit nie vir my bekendgemaak nie.”

Toe sê sy: “Meneer, het ek u gevra vir ’n seun? Het ek dan nie gesê u moenie vir my valse hoop gee nie?”

Elisa sê toe vir Gehasi: “Maak jou gereed. Vat my kiere in jou hand en gaan. Moenie met enigiemand op die pad praat of hom groet nie. Gaan gou en sit die kiere op die seun se gesig.”

Maar die seun se ma sê: “So seker as die HERE leef en u self ook leef, ek sal nie huis toe gaan tensy u met my saamgaan nie.” Elisa het toe opgestaan en saam met haar gegaan.

Gehasi het vooruitgegaan en die kiere op die kind se gesig gesit, maar daar was geen teken van lewe nie. Hy gaan toe terug na Elisa toe en sê vir hom: “Die seun het nie wakker geword nie.”

Toe Elisa daar aankom, het die kind nog dood op die profeet se bed gelê. Hy het alleen ingegaan, die deur agter hulle twee toegemaak en tot die HERE gebid. Toe gaan lê hy op die seun met sy mond op dié van die seun, sy oë op die seun s’n en sy hande op die kind s’n. Die seun se liggaam het begin warm word! Elisa staan toe op en stap ’n paar keer heen en weer in die kamer. Toe gaan lê hy weer op die seun. Hierdie keer het die seun sewe keer genies en sy oë oopgemaak!

Elisa beveel toe vir Gehasi: “Gaan roep die Sunamitiese vrou!” Toe sy inkom, sê Elisa: “Hier, vat jou seun!” Sy kom toe in, val voor hom

neer en buig voor hom, oorstelp van dankbaarheid. Sy het haar seun opgetel en hom ondertoe gedra.

Onder al Elisa se merkwaardige dade, het die een wat waarskynlik die bekendste is, begin met die getuienis van 'n jong meisie van Israel. Haar naam is onbekend, maar haar situasie was nie ongewoon nie. Sy is deur vyandelike stropers uit Aram weggevoer en het toe as 'n slaaf in die huishouding van 'n weermagbevelvoerder gaan bly. Hierdie man, Naäman, was melaats. Die Israelitiese meisie het hom aangemoedig om genesing te gaan vind by die profeet van haar God. Uit desperaatheid het Naäman Elisa gaan opsoek en nogal verrassende instruksies van die profeet gekry: Gaan was jou in die Jordaanrivier. Toe Naäman doen wat vir hom gesê is, is hy heeltemal genees. Maar toe Gehasi, Elisa se dienaar, 'n klein beloning vir hierdie wonderwerk probeer kry, is hy met melaatsheid gestraf.

Nie die profeet van die Here of die woorde wat hy gespreek het, moes ligtelik opgeneem word nie. Dit het koning Aram ontdek.

Die koning van die Arameërs was in 'n oorlog teen Israel gewikkel. Hy het met sy offisiere beraadslaag en gesê: “Ons sal ons kamp op dié en dié plek opslaan.”

Elisa, die man van God, het egter dadelik die koning van Israel gewaarsku: “Moenie naby daardie plek gaan nie, want die Arameërs trek daarheen op.” Dan het die koning boodskappers na die plek gestuur waarvan die man van God gepraat het en die mense gewaarsku. Hulle was dus op hulle hoede. Dit het etlike kere gebeur.

Hieroor was die koning van Aram baie ontsteld. Hy roep toe sy offisiere en vra hulle: “Wie van julle is die verraaier? Wie is dit wat die koning van Israel oor my planne inlig?”

“Dis nie ons nie, o Koning,” antwoord een van die offisiere. “Elisa, die profeet in Israel, vertel alles aan die koning van Israel. Selfs wat u in u slaapkamer sê, is aan hom bekend!”

Die koning van Aram beveel hulle toe: “Gaan en stel vas waar Elisa is. Dan stuur ek troepe om hom te vang.” Hy kry toe berig: “Elisa is in Dotan.” Een nag stuur die koning van Aram toe 'n groot leër en baie perde en strydwaens om die dorp te omsingel.

Toe die dienaar van die man van God die volgende môre vroeg opstaan en buitentoe gaan, sien hy oral net troepe, perde en strydwaens. Benoud roep hy vir Elisa: “Ag, Meneer, wat moet ons nou maak?”

“Moenie bang wees nie!” sê Elisa vir hom. “Daar is meer aan ons

kant as aan hulle kant!”

Toe bid Elisa: “HERE, maak tog sy oë oop sodat hy kan sien!” Die HERE het sy dienaar se oë oopgemaak. Toe hy opkyk, sien hy dat daar baie perde en strydwaens van vuur op die heuwels rondom Elisa was.

Toe die Aramese leër naderkom, bid Elisa: “HERE, slaan hulle tog met blindheid!” Die HERE het gedoen soos Elisa gevra het.

Elisa sê toe vir hulle: “Julle is op die verkeerde pad! Dis ook nie die regte stad nie! Volg my en ek sal julle neem na die man vir wie julle soek.” So het hy hulle na Samaria toe gelei.

Net toe hulle Samaria binnegaan, bid Elisa: “HERE, laat hulle weer sien.” Die HERE het hulle oë oopgemaak en toe hulle opkyk, is hulle binne-in Samaria!

Toe die koning van Israel hulle sien, roep hy vir Elisa: “Moet ek hulle doodmaak, my vader, moet ek hulle doodmaak?”

“Natuurlik nie!” sê Elisa vir hom. “Maak jy die krygsgevangenes dood wat jy met jou swaard en boog gevang het? Gee vir hulle kos en iets om te drink sodat hulle kan teruggaan na hulle koning toe.” Die koning het toe ’n groot fees vir hulle voorgesit en hulle toe teruggestuur na hulle koning toe. Daarna het die Aramese plundersaars nie weer die land Israel binnegeval nie.

Voor Elisa se dood het hy opdrag gegee dat Jehu as koning van Israel gesalf word. Dieselfde Jehu, gevul met heilige ywer, het met ’n regiment na Isebel se huis in Jisreël opgetrek. Jehu het haar vreesloos gekonfronteer en haar slawe gevra om haar by die venster uit te gooi. Die “vervloekte vrou” het daardie dag gesterf, en later is Agab se hele nageslag doodgemaak. Hierdie dinge het gebeur in vervulling van Elia se profesie jare gelede. Toe het Jehu sy swaard gelig teen die heidense Baälprofete, want die grootste en mees subtiele bedreiging het gelê in die ondermyning van die aanbidding van die ware God. Die Baälaltare moes verwoes word voordat Israel beveilig kon word.

Baie konings het gekom en gegaan in Israel en Juda. Sommige het goddelike hervormings bewerkstellig; ander het ’n gemors gemaak van wat hulle geërf het. Ahasia, Jehu se seun, het sy weermag verloor, maar die nasie bymekaar gehou. Ongeveer 797 v.C. het Elisa nog een aankondiging teen die Arameërs gemaak in antwoord op die desperate pleidooie van koning Joas. Toe die koning verseker is van oorwinning, het Elisa gesterf.

Jerobeam II het die leisels oorgeneem en Israel se grense beveilig, maar hy het nooit Israel se siel beskerm nie. Die aanbidding van vals gode en die besigheid van afgode maak het floreer tydens sy bewind.

Gedurende hierdie bloeiende tydperk het 'n profeet op die toneel verskyn met 'n boodskap van geregtigheid en oordeel.

Hierdie boodskap oor Israel is vir Amos, 'n skaapboer uit Tekoa, gegee. Hy het dit twee jaar voor die aardbewing deur 'n visioen ontvang. Dit was in die tyd toe Ussia koning van Juda was en Jerobeam, die seun van Joas, koning van Israel.

Amos het die volgende gesê:

Luister na hierdie boodskap wat Ek, die HERE, oor julle te sê het, mense van Israel. Dit raak die hele volk wat Ek uit Egipte laat trek het.

“Ek het net vir julle gekies
uit al die volke op die aarde.
Daarom sal Ek julle straf
vir al julle sondes.”

Kondig die volgende boodskap in die paleise
in Asdod en in Egipte aan:
“Kom by mekaar op die heuwels rondom Samaria
en aanskou die groot misdade
en onderdrukking wat in hierdie stad aangaan.”

Die HERE sê: “Hierdie mense het vergeet
wat dit beteken om reg te laat geskied.
Hulle luukse blyplekke is vol rykdom,
deur diefstal en geweld in die hande gekry.”

Die oppermagtige HERE sê verder:

“Daarom is 'n vyand op pad!
Hy sal die vestings afbreek
en jou paleise plunder.”

Die oppermagtige HERE het 'n eed geneem:
“Die dag sal kom
wanneer hulle julle aan hoeke sal wegsleep,
elkeen van julle soos 'n vis aan 'n hoek!
Julle sal reguit deur die opening
in die stadsmuur gaan.
Hulle sal julle wegvat na Hermonberg toe.”
Dit is wat die HERE sê!

“Honger en hongersnood
het Ek in elke dorp gebring.
Nogtans het julle nie na My toe teruggekeer nie.

“Ek het plaë oor julle laat kom
soos destyds oor Egipte.
Ek het julle jong mans in die oorlog laat sterf
en julle perde afgemaai.
Die reuk van dood het oor julle gehang.
Nogtans,” sê die HERE, “het julle nie teruggekeer
na My toe nie.

“Daarom, Israel, sal Ek al hierdie dinge
wat Ek gesê het met jou laat gebeur.
Staal jou, Israel, om jou God te ontmoet!”

Kom terug na die HERE toe en leef!
As julle dit nie doen nie, sal Hy soos vuur
deur die nageslag van Josef trek.

Doen wat goed is en vlug vir die kwaad,
dan sal julle lewe!
Dan sal Hy, die HERE God, die Almagtige, by julle wees
soos julle gesê het dat Hy is.
Julle moet die bose haat en die goeie liefhê.
Sorg dat regverdigheid in die howe seëvier.
Miskien sal die HERE God, die Almagtige, nog genade hê
vir dié wat oorgebly het van Josef se nageslag.

“Ek, die oppermagtige HERE,
hou die sondige koninkryk dop.”
Hy sê: “Ek sal hulle verwyder
van hulle grond.
Tog sal Ek nie die nageslag van Jakob
heeltemal uitwis nie.”

Hosea was ’n profeet in Israel. Hy het sy hart uitgestort en met ’n nasie gepleit wat geweier het om ’n getroue God lief te hê. Hosea het die Noordryk gewaarsku dat as hulle nie berou toon en terugkeer na God nie, hulle ernstige gevolge in die oë sou moes kyk.

Volk van Israel, luister na die woord van die HERE!

Die HERE het 'n regsak
teen die inwoners van die land.
Hy sê: “Daar is geen getrouheid, goedheid
of 'n intieme verhouding met God in julle land nie.
Julle vloek en lieg, maak dood
en steel, en pleeg egbreuk.
Oral is daar geweld en bloedvergieting.

“Julle optrede verhinder julle
om terug te kom na julle God toe.
'n Gees van ontug is in julle midde soos met 'n prostituut.
Daarom ken julle nie die HERE nie.

“Hulle was ontrou aan die HERE
deur kinders te verwek wat nie Syne is nie.
Nou sal hulle elke maand
saam met hulle landerye verslind word.

“Ek is soos 'n leeu wat Israel
en Juda uitmekaarskeur.
Ek sal hulle wegdra,
en daar sal niemand wees wat hulle kan red nie.
Dan sal Ek terugkeer na my plek toe
totdat hulle hulle skuld bely
en na My opsien vir hulp.
Sodra hulle moeilikheid het,
dán sal hulle My soek.”

“Ek sal hulle sondes onthou
en hulle tot verantwoording roep:
hulle sal na Egipte toe teruggaan.
Want Israel het sy Maker vergeet
en paleise gebou.
Juda het versterkte stede opgerig.
Daarom stuur Ek 'n vuur in hulle stede
wat hulle vestings sal vernietig.”

Die oomblik van Israel se straf het aangebreek.
Die dag van vergelding is hier.
Israel sal dit deeglik besef.
“Die profeet is 'n dwaas!” skree die mense.

“Die man van die Gees is van sy kop af!” spot hulle.
Dis omdat jou sonde so baie
en jou vyandigheid so groot is
teenoor hulle wat God dien.

Keer terug na die HERE jou God, o Israel,
want jou sondes is jou ondergang.

Bely jou sondes
en keer terug na die HERE toe.

Sê vir Hom:

“Vergewe tog al ons sondes
en aanvaar ons in genade
sodat ons weer ’n lofoffer aan U kan bring.”

Alhoewel die profete die mense gewaarsku het, het die Noordryk van Israel nie geluister nie. Hulle het hulle harte verhard en voortgegaan om God se pleidooie om terug te keer na sy weë geïgnoreer. Die konings van Israel het die mense in geestelike en sosiale chaos gelei. Tussen Jerobeam II en Hosea was daar vyf ander konings wat bekend was vir die verkeerde dinge wat hulle in die oë van die Here gedoen het. Almal het aan bewind gekom of hulle troon verloor deur middel van ’n moord.

Vir hoe lank sou die mense hulle rug op die Here draai?

16

The Beginning of the End (of the Kingdom of Israel)

IN THE TWELFTH YEAR of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, but not like the kings of Israel who preceded him.

Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up to attack Hoshea, who had been Shalmaneser’s vassal and had paid him tribute. But the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was a traitor, for he had sent envoys

to So king of Egypt, and he no longer paid tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore Shalmaneser seized him and put him in prison. The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes.

All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods.



They did wicked things that aroused the LORD'S anger. They worshiped idols, though the LORD had said, "You shall not do this." The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your ancestors to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets."

But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the LORD their God.

So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.

The LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left.

Take no prisoners. Terrorize the conquered. Such were the common practices of ancient empires. To ensure against organized rebellion, Sargon II of Assyria deported more than 27,000 people from the northern kingdom of Israel to distant cities after Israel's defenses broke down. Any semblance of a nation — a people with a common cause and heritage — was gone.

In the southern kingdom of Judah, young King Hezekiah watched these developments take place. How do you run a tiny nation when

the greatest army in the world is camped on your northern border?

In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles.

And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him.

The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer and his field commander with a large army, from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They came up to Jerusalem and stopped at the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. They called for the king; and Eliakim son of Hilkiyah the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder went out to them.

The field commander said to them, "Tell Hezekiah:

"This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: On what are you basing this confidence of yours? You say you have the counsel and the might for war — but you speak only empty words. On whom are you depending, that you rebel against me? Look, I know you are depending on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which pierces the hand of anyone who leans on it! Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who depend on him. But if you say to me, "We are depending on the LORD our God" — isn't he the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, saying to Judah and Jerusalem, "You must worship before this altar in Jerusalem"?

"Come now, make a bargain with my master, the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses — if you can put riders on them! How can you repulse one officer of the least of my master's officials, even though you are depending on Egypt for chariots and horsemen?

Furthermore, have I come to attack and destroy this place without word from the Lord? The LORD himself told me to march against this country and destroy it.”

Then the commander stood and called out in Hebrew, “Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you. He cannot deliver you from my hand. Do not let Hezekiah persuade you to trust in the LORD when he says, ‘The LORD will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.’

“Do not listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me. Then each of you will eat fruit from your own vine and fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you to a land like your own — a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey. Choose life and not death!

“Do not listen to Hezekiah, for he is misleading you when he says, ‘The LORD will deliver us.’ Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?”

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sent his field commander to intimidate Hezekiah, a king faithful to God. Clearly outnumbered and facing a brutal defeat, Hezekiah appealed to the prophet Isaiah. “Please pray for God’s help,” the king entreated, tearing his clothes and wearing sackcloth in utter desperation. Isaiah, speaking for God, assured Hezekiah that God would dispose of Sennacherib and his army. With all escape routes cut off, Hezekiah’s humble prayer brought dramatic results.

Now Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah, the king of Cush, was marching out to fight against him. So he again sent messengers to Hezekiah with this word: “Say to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let the god you depend on deceive you when he says, ‘Jerusalem will not be given into the hands of the king of Assyria.’ Surely you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries, destroying them completely. And will you be delivered? Did the gods of the nations that were destroyed by my predecessors deliver them — the gods of Gozan, Harran, Rezeph and the people of Eden who were in

Tel Assar? Where is the king of Hamath or the king of Arpad? Where are the kings of Lair, Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah?"

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed to the Lord: "Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God.

"It is true, LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God."

Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria. This is the word that the LORD has spoken against him:

"Who is it you have ridiculed and blasphemed?¹

Against whom have you raised your voice

and lifted your eyes in pride?

Against the Holy One of Israel!

By your messengers

you have ridiculed the Lord.

"But I know where you are

and when you come and go

and how you rage against me.

Because you rage against me

and because your insolence has reached my ears,

I will put my hook in your nose

and my bit in your mouth,

and I will make you return

by the way you came.'

"Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria:

"He will not enter this city

or shoot an arrow here.

He will not come before it with shield

or build a siege ramp against it.

By the way that he came he will return;

he will not enter this city,

declares the LORD.

I will defend this city and save it,

for my sake and for the sake of David my servant."

That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning — there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.

One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisrok, his sons Adrammelek and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.

The greatest of the writing prophets, Isaiah, began his work in

Jerusalem (capital of Judah, the southern kingdom) in 740 BC, shortly before King Uzziah died. Isaiah achieved prominence during Hezekiah's reign, helping the king to stand-down the Assyrian threat by relying on God alone. Such a strategy must be founded on rock solid faith, and this kind of faith Isaiah clearly practiced and developed. His call to service came in a powerful vision — an apt start to a prophetic vocation that would span nearly 60 years.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim,² each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;

the whole earth is full of his glory.”

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

False prophets acted as public relations consultants, measuring their message against audience expectations. But true prophets like Isaiah simply spoke the word of God without bowing to political pressure. This truly literary prophet was no mere stylist. Isaiah's message contained some bad news: Jerusalem would fall. Once announced, that event was sure to happen.

See now, the Lord,
the LORD Almighty,

is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah
both supply and support:

all supplies of food and all supplies of water,
the hero and the warrior,

the judge and the prophet,
the diviner and the elder,

the captain of fifty and the man of rank,
the counselor, skilled craftsman and clever enchanter.

Jerusalem staggers,
Judah is falling;

their words and deeds are against the LORD,
defying his glorious presence.

The look on their faces testifies against them;
they parade their sin like Sodom;
they do not hide it.

Woe to them!
They have brought disaster upon themselves.

My people, your guides lead you astray;
they turn you from the path.

The LORD takes his place in court;
he rises to judge the people.

Listen, a noise on the mountains,
like that of a great multitude!

Listen, an uproar among the kingdoms,
like nations massing together!

The LORD Almighty is mustering

an army for war.

They come from faraway lands,
from the ends of the heavens —

the LORD and the weapons of his wrath —
to destroy the whole country.

The people turned away from God and faced the consequences of exile and oppression. But the story was far from over. God had not forgotten them, and he longed to lavish compassion and grace on them yet again. Isaiah's prophecies also foretold that after God's judgment, the Israelites would return home from Babylon and rebuild their nation, clearly revealing that the Lord God was in control of world events.

The LORD will have compassion on Jacob;
once again he will choose Israel
and will settle them in their own land.

Foreigners will join them
and unite with the descendants of Jacob.

Nations will take them
and bring them to their own place.

And Israel will take possession of the nations
and make them male and female servants in
the LORD'S land.

They will make captives of their captors
and rule over their oppressors.

On the day the LORD gives you relief from your suffering and
turmoil and from the harsh labor forced on you, you will take up this
taunt against the king of Babylon:

How the oppressor has come to an end!
How his fury has ended!

The LORD has broken the rod of the wicked,
the scepter of the rulers.

This is what the LORD says:

“In the time of my favor I will answer you,
and in the day of salvation I will help you;

I will keep you and will make you
to be a covenant for the people,

to restore the land
and to reassign its desolate inheritances,

to say to the captives, ‘Come out,’
and to those in darkness, ‘Be free!’”

Shout for joy, you heavens;
rejoice, you earth;
burst into song, you mountains!

For the LORD comforts his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,
the Lord has forgotten me.”

“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast
and have no compassion on the child she has borne?

Though she may forget,
I will not forget you!

See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;
your walls are ever before me.

Your children hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart
from you.

Lift up your eyes and look around;
all your children gather and come to you.

As surely as I live,” declares the LORD,
“you will wear them all as ornaments;

you will put them on, like a bride.

“Then you will know that I am the LORD;
those who hope in me will not be disappointed.

“Then all mankind will know that I,
the LORD, am your Savior,
your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”

The promised future return of the kingdom of Judah was to be a precursor of something much more glorious that was still to come — God’s greater plan for giving his people endless freedom and glory. Isaiah’s prophecies ended with promises of a suffering Servant, the Messiah, who would usher in a glorious kingdom without end.

Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;

and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;

he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?

For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,

though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him
to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,

he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;

by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,

because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

In the meantime, faithful King Hezekiah died and was buried. Unfortunately, his son, Manasseh, did not follow the faithful example set by his father. Manasseh's reign actively supported detestable religious practices and brutal oppression. The righteous³ people in the land must have recalled fond memories of the good old days of Hezekiah, while enduring Manasseh's betrayals and compromise.

1Blasphemed:Uttered words or actions intended to insult or devalue God.

2Seraphim:Angelic beings occupied constantly in the praise and worship of God.

3Righteous:A righteous person is one who values God above everyone and everything. A righteous person lives a life of obedience to God.

Die begin van die einde

(van die koninkryk van Israel)

In die twaalfde jaar van koning Agas se bewind in Juda het Hosea seun van Ela koning geword oor Israel. Hy het nege jaar in Samaria regeer. Hy het gedoen wat vir die HERE verkeerd was, maar dit was nie so erg soos die konings wat sy voorgangers in Israel was nie.

Toe koning Salmaneser van Assirië teen hom optrek, het koning Hosea hom aan die koning van Assirië onderwerp en jaarliks belasting aan hom betaal. Maar Hosea het teen die koning van Assirië saamgesweer deur koning So van Egipte te vra vir hulp. Hy het ook geweier om die jaarlikse belasting aan die koning van Assirië te betaal. Daarom het koning Salmaneser vir Hosea gevang en in die tronk gesit. Die koning van Assirië het die hele land binnegeval, Samaria aangeval en drie jaar lank beleër. In die negende jaar van koning Hosea se bewind het die koning van Assirië Samaria ingeneem en die inwoners in ballingskap na Assirië toe weggevoer. Hulle is in kolonies in Galag, aan die Gaborrivier in Gosan, en in die stede van Medië hervestig.



Hierdie ramp het oor die Israeliete gekom omdat hulle ander gode vereer het. Sodoende het hulle gesondig teen die HERE hulle God wat hulle uit Egipte bevry het uit die mag van Farao, die koning van Egipte. Hulle het ander gode gedien.

Hulle het bose dinge gedoen wat die HERE uitgetart het. Hulle het afstootlike beelde aanbid ten spyte van die HERE se uitdruklike waarskuwings. Die HERE het al sy profete en sieners gestuur om sowel Israel as Juda te waarsku: “Bekeer julle van julle bose lewenswyses.

Luister na my opdragte en voorskrifte volgens al die gebooie wat Ek julle voorvaders beveel het en wat Ek deur my dienaars die profete aan julle bekendgemaak het.”

Maar die Israeliëte wou nie luister nie. Hulle was net so koppig soos hulle voorvaders wat nie op die HERE hulle God vertrou het nie.

Israel is uit hulle land weggevoer na Assirië toe, waar hulle vandag nog is.

Die HERE was so ontevrede met Israel dat Hy hulle van Hom verstoot het. Net die stam Juda het oorgebly.

Moet geen gevangenes neem nie. Terroriseer die oorwonnes. Dit was algemeen praktyk in die antieke ryke. Om te verseker dat daar geen georganiseerde rebellies is nie, het Sargon II van Assirië meer as 27 000 mense van die noordelike ryk van Israel na veraf geleë stede verban nadat Israel se verdediging afgebreek is. Enige sweem van 'n nasie – mense met 'n gemene doel en erfenis – was daarmee heen.

In die suidelike koninkryk van Juda het jong koning Hiskia die verwickelinge dopgehou. Hoe bestuur jy 'n klein nasie wanneer die grootste weermag in die wêreld op jou noordelike grens kamp opgeslaan het?

In die derde jaar van koning Hosea seun van Ela se bewind in Israel het Hiskia seun van Agas koning van Juda geword. Hy was 25 toe hy koning geword het en het 29 jaar in Jerusalem regeer. Sy ma was Abi dogter van Sagaria. Hy het gedoen wat reg was vir die HERE, net soos sy voorvader Dawid gedoen het. Hy het die heidense hoogtes verwyder, die heilige klippilare stukkend geslaan en die Asjerapale afgekap.

Die HERE was met Hiskia en hy was suksesvol in alles wat hy gedoen het. Hy het teen die koning van Assirië in opstand gekom en was nie meer aan hom onderdanig nie.

Die koning van Assirië het sy hoofbevelvoerder, sy hoofamptenaar en sy hoofadjutant met 'n groot leer vanuit Lakis gestuur na koning Hiskia in Jerusalem. Hulle het tot by Jerusalem opgeruk en stelling ingeneem by die kanaal van die boonste dam, naby die pad na die Bleikveld toe. Hulle roep toe na koning Hiskia, maar die koning stuur die volgende beamptes na hulle toe: die paleisbestuurder Eljakim seun

van Gilkija, die staatsekretaris Sebna, en die hoof uitvoerende beampte Joag seun van Asaf.

Die hoofadjutant van die Assiriese koning stuur toe hierdie boodskap aan koning Hiskia:

“Dit is wat die groot koning van Assirië sê: Waarop vertrou jy dat jy so hoopvol is? Dink jy dat blote woorde weerstand kan bied teen militêre strategie en krag? Op wie vertrou jy dat jy teen my in opstand kom? Is dit op Egipte? Egipte is ’n versplinterde riet wat onder jou gewig breek en ’n gat deur jou hand steek. Dit is wat die farao van Egipte doen met almal wat op hom staatmaak! Maar dalk sal julle sê: ‘Ons vertrou op die HERE ons God!’ Is Hy dan nie die Een vir wie koning Hiskia beledig het nie? Dis mos al sy hoogtes en altare wat Hiskia afgebreek het en beveel het: ‘Elkeen in Juda moet net by hierdie altaar in Jerusalem aanbid!’

“Ek sal jou sê! My meester, die koning van Assirië, sal ’n ooreenkoms met jou aangaan: As jy 2 000 ruiters kan voorsien, sal ek jou 2 000 perde gee om op te ry. Hoe sal jy weerstand kan bied teen een afdeling, die swakste van my heer se troepe, selfs met die hulp van Egipte se strydwaens en perderuiters? Wat meer is, dink jy ons het jou land binnegeval sonder die goedkeuring van die HERE? Die HERE self het vir ons gesê: ‘Trek op en verwoes die land!’”

Toe gaan staan hy en skree hard in Judees: “Luister na die boodskap van die groot koning van Assirië! Dit is wat die koning sê: Moenie toelaat dat koning Hiskia julle mislei nie! Hy kan julle nie uit my mag red nie. Moenie dat hy julle oorreed om op die HERE te vertrou deur te sê: ‘Die HERE sal ons beslis red! Hy sal nie toelaat dat hierdie stad in die mag van die koning van Assirië oorgegee word nie.’

“Moenie na Hiskia luister nie! Dit is wat die koning van Assirië sê: Maak vrede met my en kom oor na my toe. Dan sal ek toelaat dat elkeen van sy eie wingerdstok en vyeboom eet en uit sy eie put water drink. Dan sal ek kom en julle na ’n ander land soos hierdie een van julle neem. Dis ’n land met koring en wyn, kos en wingerde, olyfbome en heuning. Kies nou die lewe in plaas van die dood!

“Moenie na Hiskia luister wanneer hy sê: ‘Die HERE sal ons red!’ nie. Het die gode van enige ander nasie ooit hulle mense uit die mag van die koning van Assirië gered?”

Sanherib, koning van Assirië, het sy hoofadjutant gestuur om vir Hiskia, ’n koning getrou aan God, te intimideer. Duidelik in die

minderheid en op die punt om oorwin te word, het Hiskia vir Jesaja om hulp gevra. “Bid asseblief om God vir hulp,” het hy gepleit, sy klere geskeur en rouklere aangetrek. Jesaja het met God gepraat en Hiskia verseker dat God met Sanherib en sy weermag sou afreken. Met alle ontsnappingsroetes afgesny, het Hiskia se nederige gebed dramatiese resultate tot gevolg gehad.

Kort daarna kry koning Sanherib van Assirië berig dat koning Tirhaka van Kus met ’n leër op pad is om hom aan te val. Voordat hy vertrek om die aanval te weerstaan, stuur hy die volgende brief met boodskappers aan Hiskia in Jerusalem: “Hierdie boodskap is vir koning Hiskia van Juda. Moenie toelaat dat jou God op wie jy vertrou, jou mislei met beloftes dat die koning van Assirië nie Jerusalem sal inneem nie. Jy weet alte goed wat die konings van Assirië gedoen het waar hulle ook al gegaan het. Hulle het elkeen wat in hulle pad was, vernietig! Hoekom sou jy dit vryspring? Het die gode van ander nasies hulle kom red, nasies soos Gosan, Haran, Resef en die inwoners van Eden wat in Telassar was? My voorgangers het hulle almal vernietig! Wat het gebeur met die koning van Hamat en die koning van Arpad? Wat het gebeur met die konings van Sefarwajim, Hena en Awwa?”

Nadat Hiskia die brief van die boodskappers ontvang en gelees het, gaan hy op na die HERE se tempel toe en sprei dit oop voor die HERE. Toe bid hy voor die HERE soos volg: “O HERE, God van Israel, U wat oor die serafs troon! U alleen is God oor al die koninkryke op die aarde. U het die hemel en die aarde gemaak. Luister tog na my, o HERE, en hoor wat ek sê. Maak tog u oë oop en kyk, HERE! Luister hoe Sanherib die lewende God beledig!

“Dit is waar, HERE, die konings van Assirië het al hierdie nasies met hulle grondgebiede verwoes. Dis waar dat hulle die gode van hierdie nasies verbrand het. Maar natuurlik kon die Assiriërs hulle vernietig! Hulle was glad nie gode nie, net maar beelde van hout en klip, die werk van mensehande. Nou, o HERE, ons God, red ons uit die mag van Assirië! Dan sal al die koninkryke op die aarde weet dat U alleen, o HERE, God is.”

Toe stuur Jesaja seun van Amos die volgende boodskap aan Hiskia: “Dis wat die HERE, die God van Israel, sê: Ek het jou gebed oor koning Sanherib van Assirië gehoor. Dit is wat die HERE oor hom sê:

“Wie dink jy het jy beledig en belaglik gemaak?
Teen wie het jy jou stem verhef
en met trots jou oë opgeslaan?

Dit was die Heilige van Israel!
Deur jou boodskappers
het jy die Here gelaster.

“Maar Ek ken jou goed:
Ek weet of jy kom of gaan,
ook hoe jy uitvaar teen My.
En weens jou woede teen My
en jou verwaandheid wat Ek self gehoor het,
sit Ek my haak deur jou neus
en my stang in jou mond.
Dan sal Ek jou laat teruggaan
op die pad waarlangs jy gekom het.

“Daarom, so sê die HERE oor die koning van Assirië:

“Hy sal nie in Jerusalem inkom
of ’n pyl hier afskiet nie.
Hy sal nie met skilde opruk
of beleëringswalke teen sy mure ophoop nie.
Met die pad waarlangs hy gekom het, sal hy teruggaan.
Hierdie stad sal hy nie binnegaan nie,”
sê die HERE.

“Ek sal hierdie stad beskerm en red
ter wille van my eer en van my dienaar Dawid.”

Daardie nag het die engel van die HERE na die kamp van die Assiriërs gegaan en 185 000 Assiriese manskappe doodgemaak. Toe die Assiriërs die volgende oggend wakker word, kry hulle oral net lyke. Toe het koning Sanherib van Assirië kamp afgeslaan en na sy eie land toe teruggegaan. Hy het huis toe, na sy hoofstad Nineve, gegaan en daar gebly.

Eendag, terwyl hy in die tempel van sy god Nisrok aanbid het, het sy seuns Adrammelek en Sareser hom met hulle swaarde doodgemaak. Hulle het na Ararat toe gevlug. ’n Ander seun, Eserhaddon, het hom as koning van Assirië opgevolg.

Die grootste profeet, Jesaja, het sy werk in Jerusalem (die hoofstad van Juda, die suidelike koninkryk) in 740 v.C. begin, kort voor koning Ussia se dood. Jesaja was ’n belangrike persoon tydens koning

Hiskia se heerskappy. Hy het die koning gehelp om die Assiriese bedreiging teen te staan deur net op God te vertrou. So 'n strategie is gebou op 'n soliede rots van geloof, en hierdie is duidelik die tipe geloof wat Jesaja beoefen en ontwikkel het. Sy oproep tot diens het met 'n kragtige visioen begin – 'n geskikte begin vir 'n profetiese beroep wat oor 60 jaar sou strek.

In die jaar wat koning Ussia dood is, het ek die Here gesien. Sy troon was hoog en verhewe, en die soom van sy kleed het die tempel gevul. Rondom Hom was serafs, elkeen met ses vlerke. Met twee het hulle hulle gesig toegemaak, met twee hulle voete bedek en met twee het hulle gevlieg. Hulle het mekaar toegeroep:

“Heilig, heilig, heilig is die HERE, die Almagtige!
Die hele aarde is vol van sy heerlikheid!”

Die fundamente het geskud van die geluid, en die tempel was vol rook.

Ek het hard geroep: “Ellende het my getref! Want ek is 'n sondige mens, tussen ander sondige mense. En tog het ek die Koning, die HERE, die Almagtige, gesien!”

Toe het een van die serafs na die altaar toe gevlieg en 'n gloeiende kool met 'n tang opgetel. Hy het my lippe daarmee aangeraak en gesê: “Kyk, hierdie kool het jou lippe aangeraak. Nou is jou skuld weg en jou sondes vergewe.”

Toe het ek die Here hoor vra: “Wie kan Ek met 'n boodskap na my volk toe stuur? Wie sal vir Ons gaan?”

Ek het geantwoord: “HERE, ek sal gaan! Stuur my!”

Vals profete het as skakelbeamptes opgetree en hulle boodskappe gemeet aan die gehoor se verwagtings. Maar ware profete, soos Jesaja, het bloot God se woord gepraat sonder om toe te gee aan politieke druk. Hierdie ware literêre profeet was nie net 'n stilis nie. Jesaja se boodskap het slegte nuus ingehou: Jerusalem sou tot 'n val kom. Toe dit eers aangekondig is, sou die gebeurtenis vir seker plaasvind.

Die Here, die HERE, die Almagtige,
sal die kos- en watervoorrade
van Jerusalem en Juda afsny.
Hy gaan elkeen van die leiers

van die volk vernietig:
helde, soldate, regters, profete,
waarsêers, ouderlinge,
leëroffisiere, eerbare burgers,
adviseurs, kundige vakmanne
en deskundige besweerders.

Van Juda en Jerusalem
sal net ruïnes oorbly
omdat hulle met woord en daad die HERE teenstaan
en hulle nie steur aan sy heerlike teenwoordigheid nie.
Hulle gesigte gee hulle al weg dat hulle skuldig is.
Hulle sondig openlik soos die mense van Sodom.
Hulle steek dit nie eens weg nie.
Hulle het hulle eie ondergang bewerkstellig!

My volk, julle leiers vat julle op die verkeerde pad,
na julle vernietiging toe.

Die HERE maak Hom klaar
om die volk te oordeel.

Hoor die geraas op die berge!
Luister hoe die weermagte opruk!
Dit is die geraas en geroep
van baie nasies.
Die HERE, die Almagtige, het hulle hiernatoe gebring
om 'n leër te vorm.
Hulle kom van veraf lande.
Hulle is die HERE se wapens.
Hulle sal die hele land vernietig.

Die mense het weggedraai van God en moes die gevolge van die verbanning en onderdrukking dra. Maar die storie was ver van klaar. God het hulle nie vergeet nie, en Hy wou graag weer medelye en genade aan hulle betoon. Jesaja se profesieë het ook gesê dat wanneer die Here se oordeel klaar is, die Israëliete van Babilon af sou terugkeer en hulle nasie herbou. Dit het duidelik gewys dat die Here God in beheer van wêreldgebeure was.

Die HERE sal genade bewys aan die kinders van Jakob.

Israel sal steeds sy volk wees.
Hy sal hulle terugbring en weer laat bly in hulle eie land.
Vreemde mense van baie verskillende nasies sal kom
en deel word van die volk Israel.
Die volke van die wêreld sal die HERE se volk help
om terug te kom,
en die mense wat in hulle land kom woon, sal hulle dien.
Dié wat Israel gevang het, sal gevang word
en Israel sal oor sy vyande regeer.

In daardie wonderlike dag as die HERE sy volk laat rus van lyding,
verwarring en wrede slawerny, sal jy die koning van Babel spot. Jy sal sê:

“Die magtige is vernietig.
Ja, sy aстранheid het opgehou.
Want die HERE het jou borse mag verpletter
en jou regering laat val.”

So sê die HERE:

“Op die regte oomblik sal Ek jou antwoord.
Op die dag wat Ek red, sal Ek jou help.
Ek sal jou bewaar en jou maak
tot ’n verbond met my volk
om sy land te herstel
en die verlate eiendom weer terug te kry
om aan die gevangenes te sê: ‘Kom uit!’
en aan hulle in duisternis: ‘Wees vry!’”

Sing van vreugde, hemel!
Aarde, wees bly!
Berge, juig met ’n vrolike lied!
Want die HERE het sy volk getroos.
Hy sal Hom ontferm oor hulle wat in ellende is.

Tog het Sion gesê: “Die HERE het my verlaat.
Die Here het my vergeet.”

“Kan ’n ma die baba vergeet wat aan haar bors drink?
Kan sy geen medelye hê
met die kind wat sy in die wêreld gebring het nie?

Selfs al sou dit tog moontlik wees,

Ék sal jou nie vergeet nie!

Kyk, Ek het jou naam in my hand gegraveer.

Die mure van Jerusalem wat afgebreek is, is altyd voor My.

Baie gou sal jou nageslag hulle terughaas,

maar hulle wat jou verwoes het, sal wegvlug.

Kyk rondom jou.

Al jou kinders sal terugkom na jou toe.

So seker as Ek lewe,” sê die HERE,

“jy sal hulle dra soos juwele,

soos ’n bruid haar juwele aansit.

“Dan sal jy weet dat Ek die HERE is.

Wie sy hoop op My stel, sal nie teleurgestel word nie.

“Die hele wêreld sal weet:

Ek is die HERE, jou Redder

en jou Verlosser, die Magtige van Jakob.”

Die beloofde toekomstige terugkeer van die koninkryk van Juda sou die voorloop wees van iets baie wonderliker wat nog sou gebeur – God se groter plan om vir sy mense eindelose vryheid en heerlikheid te gee. Jesaja se profesieë het geëindig met ’n belofte van ’n lydende Dienskneg, die Messias, wat ’n eindelose glorieryke koninkryk sou inlei.

Wie het ons boodskap geglo?

Aan wie het die HERE sy reddende mag openbaar?

My dienaar het gegroei soos ’n loot wat uitspruit

in die teenwoordigheid van die HERE,

soos ’n plant wat groei in droë grond.

Hy was nie mooi of koninklik sodat hy ons sou aantrek,

of met ’n voorkoms dat ons van hom sou hou nie.

Hy was verag en verwerp deur mense,

iemand wat leed en pyn geken het.

Hy was soos iemand vir wie mense die gesig wegdraai,

verag en ons het hom nie geag nie.

Tog was dit ons swakhede wat hy gedra het.

Hy het ons pyn verduur.

Ons het aan hom gedink

as dat God hom slaan, kasty en teister.

Hy is geslaan en gepynig ter wille van ons sondes.

Hy is gestraf sodat ons in vrede kan leef.

Hy is geslaan sodat ons gesond kan word.

Almal van ons het weggedwaal soos 'n klomp skape.

Ons het ons eie pad gevolg.

En toe het die HERE

ons almal se skuld en sondes

op hom laat neerkom.

Hy is geslaan en mishandel,

maar hy het sy mond nie oopgemaak nie.

Hy is soos 'n lam wat ter slagting gelei word.

Soos 'n skaap stil is voor sy skeerders,

so het ook hy sy mond nie oopgemaak nie.

Hy is verdruk, skuldig bevind, en weggelei na sy dood.

Wie van sy mense het besef

dat hy vir hulle sondes doodgemaak word?

Dat hy eintlik in hulle plek gestraf word?

Hy het niks verkeerd gedoen nie,

en het nooit enigiemand bedrieg nie.

Tog is hy soos 'n misdadiger begrawe,

in 'n ryke se graf neergelê.

Maar dit was die HERE se wil

om hom te vermorsel en te laat ly.

Al het die HERE sy lewe 'n skuldoffer gemaak,

sal hy 'n groot nageslag kry en nog lank lewe.

Die HERE se plan sal as gevolg van Hom ontvou.

Ná sy bitter lyding

sal hy weer die lig sien en tevrede wees.

En deur alles wat hy beleef het, sal my regverdige dienaar

dit moontlik maak vir baie om ook regverdig te word,

want hy dra al hulle sondes.

Daarom eer Ek hom as iemand wat groot en magtig is.

Want hy was bereid om doodgemaak te word

en as misdadiger beskou te word.

Hy het die sondes van baie gedra,

en vir sondaars gebid.

Intussen het die getroue koning Hiskia gesterf en is hy begrawe.

Ongelukkig het sy seun Manasse nie sy pa se getroue voorbeeld

nagevolg nie. Manasse het die afskuwelike godsdienstige praktyke en brutale onderdrukking aktief ondersteun. Die regverdige mense in die land moes met verlange teruggedink het aan die goeie ou dae van koning Hiskia terwyl hulle Manasse se verraad en kompromieë moes verduur.

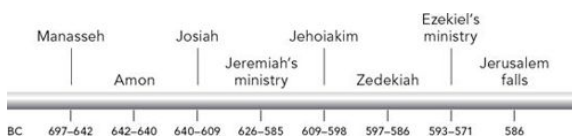
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The Kingdoms' Fall

MANASSEH WAS TWELVE YEARS OLD when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother's name was Hephzibah.

He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put my Name." In the two courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.

He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple, of which the LORD had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses gave them." But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.



The LORD said through his servants the prophets: “Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will forsake the remnant of my inheritance and give them into the hands of enemies. They will be looted and plundered by all their enemies; they have done evil in my eyes and have aroused my anger from the day their ancestors came out of Egypt until this day.”

Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end—besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the LORD.

The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. In his distress he sought the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.

Any feelings of new hope and promise aroused by Manasseh's repentance were suppressed when his son Amon became king following Manasseh's death.

Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his father Manasseh had done. Amon worshiped and offered sacrifices to all the idols Manasseh had made. But unlike his father

Manasseh, he did not humble himself before the LORD; Amon increased his guilt.

Amon's officials conspired against him and assassinated him in his palace. Then the people of the land killed all who had plotted against King Amon, and they made Josiah his son king in his place.

Amon's son Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign. Josiah reigned with success, even distinction, for 31 years of spiritual renewal and reform. During his reign the ancient Book of the Law of Moses was discovered after Josiah had ordered the run-down temple to be repaired, and Josiah followed its prescriptions zealously. He put his heart and soul into rediscovering for all the people God's way of living. But as a result of a fateful political decision he died in battle against Pharaoh Necho of Egypt in 609 BC.

The old pattern of father-not-like-son continued, and Josiah's son Jehoahaz was pathetic as king, lasting only three months. Next came Jehoiakim, who was no better.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years.

And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his predecessors had done.

During Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the land, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. But then he turned against Nebuchadnezzar and rebelled. The LORD sent Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite raiders against him to destroy Judah, in accordance with the word of the LORD proclaimed by his servants the prophets.

Jehoiakim rested with his ancestors. And Jehoiachin his son succeeded him as king.

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother's name was Ne-hushta daughter of Elnathan; she was from Jerusalem. He did evil in the eyes

of the LORD, just as his father had done.

At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it, and Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to the city while his officers were besieging it. Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him.

In the eighth year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. As the LORD had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed the treasures from the temple of the LORD and from the royal palace, and cut up the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the LORD. He carried all Jerusalem into exile: all the officers and fighting men, and all the skilled workers and artisans — a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left.

Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the prominent people of the land. The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand skilled workers and artisans. He made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah.

God allowed the powerful King Nebuchadnezzar to begin crushing Jerusalem, Judah's last stronghold of promise and hope. Under Nebuchadnezzar's order, a second, larger group of Israelites was deported to Babylon in 597 BC. Among them was a young priest named Ezekiel, a man of keen intellect, immense literary giftedness and spiritual insight.

Ezekiel relayed to his fellow exiles the stern message of God's judgment. Jerusalem was still standing, but it was the beginning of the end. In a vision, Ezekiel received his marching orders and his prophetic message: unbelief leads to doom.

In my thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north — an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, but each of them had four faces and four wings.

Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked something like a vault, sparkling like crystal, and awesome. Under the vault their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.

Then there came a voice from above the vault over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the vault over their heads was what looked like a throne of lapis lazuli, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

He said to me, “Son of man, stand up on your feet and I will speak to you.” As he spoke, the Spirit came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.

He said: “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says.’”

“And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified

by them, though they are a rebellious people. You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious.”

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, set your face against the mountains of Israel; prophesy against them and say: ‘You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Sovereign LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys: I am about to bring a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places. Your altars will be demolished and your incense altars will be smashed; and I will slay your people in front of your idols. I will lay the dead bodies of the Israelites in front of their idols, and I will scatter your bones around your altars. Wherever you live, the towns will be laid waste and the high places demolished, so that your altars will be laid waste and devastated, your idols smashed and ruined, your incense altars broken down, and what you have made wiped out. Your people will fall slain among you, and you will know that I am the LORD.

“But I will spare some, for some of you will escape the sword when you are scattered among the lands and nations. Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me — how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices. And they will know that I am the LORD; I did not threaten in vain to bring this calamity on them.’

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

“Disaster! Unheard-of disaster!
See, it comes!

“Doom has come upon you,
upon you who dwell in the land.

The time has come! The day is near!

There is panic, not joy, on the mountains.

I am about to pour out my wrath on you
and spend my anger against you.

I will judge you according to your conduct
and repay you for all your detestable practices.”

Back on the home front, things were going from bad to worse in Jerusalem. But God continued to pursue and warn his people. Another prophet, named Jeremiah, was called into service in a very interesting conversation with God.

The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
before you were born I set you apart;
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

“Alas, Sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am too young.”

But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am too young.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.

“Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

Knowing God was with him, Jeremiah shed his fears. Known as the “weeping prophet,” Jeremiah felt deeply the burden of the people’s sin

and the coming judgment. It didn't help that his message was unwelcome and unwanted. He told of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, God's judgment for the people's sins of idolatry and pride.

But another truth Jeremiah also knew and told: God's mercy will never fail, though reprieve from punishment may seem distant. For all the crumbled buildings, lives lost in hapless battles and lives squandered pursuing pagan pleasure, still God's mercies endure—tender mercies that will be lavished on a nation that had forsaken him. With the God of majestic love, nothing is impossible.

Hear the word of the LORD, you descendants of Jacob,
all you clans of Israel.

“Has a nation ever changed its gods?
(Yet they are not gods at all.)

But my people have exchanged their glorious God
for worthless idols.

Be appalled at this, you heavens,
and shudder with great horror,”

declares the LORD.

“My people have committed two sins:

They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,

and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

“Long ago you broke off your yoke
and tore off your bonds;
you said, ‘I will not serve you!’

“I had planted you like a choice vine
of sound and reliable stock.

How then did you turn against me
into a corrupt, wild vine?

Although you wash yourself with soap
and use an abundance of cleansing powder,
the stain of your guilt is still before me,”

declares the Sovereign LORD.

“As a thief is disgraced when he is caught,
so the people of Israel are disgraced —

they, their kings and their officials,
their priests and their prophets.

They say to wood, ‘You are my father,’
and to stone, ‘You gave me birth.’

They have turned their backs to me
and not their faces;

yet when they are in trouble, they say,
‘Come and save us!’

Where then are the gods you made for yourselves?
Let them come if they can save you
when you are in trouble!

For you, Judah, have as many gods
as you have towns.

“Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say:
‘Sound the trumpet throughout the land!’

Cry aloud and say:
‘Gather together!
Let us flee to the fortified cities!’

Raise the signal to go to Zion!

Flee for safety without delay!

For I am bringing disaster from the north,
even terrible destruction.”

A lion has come out of his lair;
a destroyer of nations has set out.

He has left his place
to lay waste your land.

Your towns will lie in ruins
without inhabitant.

So put on sackcloth,
lament and wail,

for the fierce anger of the LORD
has not turned away from us.

“Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem,
look around and consider,
search through her squares.

If you can find but one person
who deals honestly and seeks the truth,
I will forgive this city.”

If you do not listen,
I will weep in secret
because of your pride;

my eyes will weep bitterly,
overflowing with tears,
because the LORD’S flock will be taken captive.

Say to the king and to the queen mother,
“Come down from your thrones,
for your glorious crowns

will fall from your heads.”

The cities in the Negev will be shut up,
and there will be no one to open them.

All Judah will be carried into exile,
carried completely away.

The words of Jeremiah were clear, but the kings who followed Josiah refused to listen. They grew increasingly brash, ignoring the prophet's warnings and wisdom. Their tactics of duplicity and greed were destined to fail. Finally, Judah's kings had to face Babylon's full military muscle, rock hard and set to kill.

The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the LORD. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel. Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He encamped outside the city and built siege works all around it. The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat.

On the surface, it appeared that God had abandoned his people. Where was his mercy now? Zedekiah and his associates wanted Jeremiah to step in and ask God for help. Instead, Jeremiah foretold defeat and death as the consequence of the people's continued sin.

The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur son of Malkijah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah. They said: "Inquire now of the LORD for us because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is attacking us. Perhaps the LORD will perform wonders for us as in times past so that he will withdraw from us."

But Jeremiah answered them, "Tell Zedekiah, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am about to turn against you the weapons of war that are in your hands, which you are using to fight the king of Babylon and the Babylonians who are outside the wall besieging you. And I will gather them inside this city. I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm in furious anger and in great wrath. I will strike down those who live in this city — both man and beast — and they will die of a terrible plague. After that, declares the LORD, I will give Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the people in this city who survive the plague, sword and famine, into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to their enemies who want to kill them. He will put them to the sword; he will show them no mercy or pity or compassion.'

"Furthermore, tell the people, 'This is what the LORD says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death. Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; they will escape with their lives. I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares the LORD. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.'"

Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. They fled toward the Arabah, but the Babylonian army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, and he was captured.

He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.

On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the imperial guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile the people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had deserted to the king of Babylon. But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields.

So Judah went into captivity, away from her land.

Jerusalem had fallen. But the prophet Jeremiah was not deported. Rather, Nebuchadnezzar advised him to reside with the region's new governor, Gedaliah. Shortly thereafter, Gedaliah was assassinated. Many of the Jews still in Judah, afraid of Babylon's reprisal, fled to Egypt and forced Jeremiah to go with them. (Jewish tradition says Jeremiah was stoned to death while living in Egypt.) But Jeremiah's heart was always in the holy city of his homeland — once busy with trade and prayer, now empty and still. Jeremiah wept bitterly for his people.

How deserted lies the city,
once so full of people!

How like a widow is she,
who once was great among the nations!

She who was queen among the provinces
has now become a slave.

Bitterly she weeps at night,
tears are on her cheeks.

Among all her lovers
there is no one to comfort her.

All her friends have betrayed her;
they have become her enemies.

After affliction and harsh labor,
Judah has gone into exile.

She dwells among the nations;
she finds no resting place.

All who pursue her have overtaken her
in the midst of her distress.

The LORD has done what he planned;
he has fulfilled his word,
which he decreed long ago.

He has overthrown you without pity,
he has let the enemy gloat over you,
he has exalted the horn of your foes.

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;

it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

Remember, LORD, what has happened to us;
look, and see our disgrace.

Joy is gone from our hearts;
our dancing has turned to mourning.

The crown has fallen from our head.
Woe to us, for we have sinned!

You, LORD, reign forever;
your throne endures from generation to generation.

Why do you always forget us?
Why do you forsake us so long?

Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return;
renew our days as of old.

Though Jeremiah was faced with sorrow and tragedy, he trusted in God's mercies—as did Ezekiel. Before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, the prophet Ezekiel warned the people of the destruction that was to come. And yet once Ezekiel and his fellow exiles in Babylon received the news that Jerusalem had fallen, his message turned to hope. Although the people had turned their backs on God, they would again receive an abundance of undeserved grace and mercy.

“Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations

will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.” Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.”

The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

I said, “Sovereign LORD, you alone know.”

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’”

So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying,

there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet — a vast army.

Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”

Die koninkryke kom tot 'n val

Manasse was twaalf jaar oud toe hy koning geword het en hy het 55 jaar in Jerusalem regeer. Sy ma was Gefsa.

Hy het gedoen wat verkeerd was vir die HERE. Hy het die afskuwelike gebruike van die heidennasies wat die HERE voor die Israeliete uit die land gedryf het, nagevolg. Hy het die hoogtes wat sy pa, Hiskia, vernietig het, weer opgebou. Hy het Baälaltare en Asjerapale opgerig net soos koning Agab van Israel gedoen het. Hy het ook voor al die hemelliggame gebuig en hulle aanbid. Hy het selfs afgodsaltare opgerig in die tempel van die HERE, die plek waarvan die HERE gesê het: “In Jerusalem wil Ek my Naam vestig.” Hierdie altare ter ere van al die hemelliggame het hy in die twee voorhove van die HERE se tempel gebou. Manasse het selfs sy eie seun as offer verbrand. Hy het toordery, waarsêery en goëlery beoefen en het geeste geraadpleeg. Hy het baie dinge gedoen wat verkeerd was vir die HERE en Hom uitgetart.



Manasse het ook 'n Asjerapaal gemaak en dit opgerig in die tempel, die plek waarvan die HERE vir Dawid en sy seun Salomo gesê het: “My Naam moet vir altyd vereer word in hierdie tempel in Jerusalem, die stad wat Ek uit al die stamme van Israel gekies het. Die Israeliete moet my gebooe gehoorsaam, al die gebooe wat Ek deur my dienaar Moses gegee het. Dan sal Ek hulle nie uit hierdie land wat Ek vir hulle voorvaders gegee het, in ballingskap laat gaan nie.” Maar die mense het geweier om te luister. Manasse het hulle nog meer kwaad laat doen as die heidense volke wat die HERE vernietig het toe die Israeliete die land binnegekom het.

Toe het die HERE deur sy dienaars die profete gesê: “Koning

Manasse van Juda het baie afstootlike dinge gedoen. Hy is meer goddeloos as die Amoriëte wat voor Israel in die land gewoon het. Hy het die mense van Juda gelei om afgodery te pleeg. Daarom, so sê die HERE, die God van Israel: Ek bring soveel onheil oor Jerusalem en Juda dat die twee ore van hulle wat dit hoor, sal tuit. Ek sal Jerusalem oordeel met dieselfde maatstaf wat Ek vir Samaria gebruik het en waarmee Ek die familie van Agab geoordeel het. Ek sal Jerusalem uitvee soos 'n mens 'n skottel uitvee en dit onderstebo draai. Dan sal Ek die oorblyfsel van my volk verwerp en hulle oorgee as buit vir hulle vyande. Want hulle het gedoen wat vir My verkeerd was, en het My uitgetart vandat hulle voorouers uit Egipte gekom het tot vandag toe.”

Manasse het ook so baie onskuldige bloed vergiet dat hy Jerusalem van hoek tot kant daarmee volgemaak het. Dit was benewens die sonde wat hy Juda laat doen het. Dit alles was verkeerd vir die HERE.

Die HERE het met Manasse en sy volk gepraat, maar hulle het al sy waarskuwings geïgnoreer. Daarom het die HERE die Assiriese leërs teen hulle gestuur en hulle het Manasse gevange geneem. Hulle het 'n ring deur sy neus gesit, hom met bronskettings vasgemaak en na Babel toe gevat. Terwyl hy in die diepste nood was, het Manasse die HERE sy God om genade gevra en hom voor die God van sy voorouers verootmoedig. Toe hy bid, het die HERE na hom geluister en sy gebed verhoor en hom laat terugkeer na Jerusalem en sy koninkryk. Manasse het uiteindelik besef dat net die HERE God is.

Enige gevoel van nuwe hoop en belofte wat deur Manasse se berou opgeroep is, is onderdruk toe sy seun Amon koning geword het ná Manasse se dood.

Amon was 22 jaar oud toe hy koning geword het, en hy het twee jaar in Jerusalem regeer. Hy het gedoen wat verkeerd was vir die HERE, net soos sy pa Manasse gedoen het. Vir al die beelde wat sy pa gemaak het, het hy offers gebring en hulle gedien. Hy het egter nie homself voor die HERE verootmoedig soos sy pa gedoen het nie. Trouens, Amon het nog meer gesondig.

Amon se eie beamptes het teen hom saamgesweer en hulle het hom in sy paleis vermoor. Maar die burgers van die land het almal doodgemaak wat teen koning Amon saamgesweer het. Hulle het sy seun Josia in sy plek as koning aangestel.

Amon se seun Josia was net agt jaar oud toe hy koning geword het. Josia het vir 31 jaar van geestelike herlewing en hervorming suksesvol, selfs met onderskeiding, regeer. Gedurende sy bewind is die antieke wetboek van Moses ontdek nadat Josia opdrag gegee het dat die vervalte tempel herstel moes word, en Josia het die voorskrifte getrou nagevolg. Hy het hom hart en siel daartoe verbind om God se manier van lewe vir die mense te herontdek. Maar as gevolg van 'n fatale politieke besluit is hy in 609 v.C. dood in 'n geveg teen farao Neko van Egipte.

Die ou patroon van die appel val nie ver van die boom nie, het egter nie voortgeduur nie, en Josia se seun Joahas was 'n patetiese koning wie se heerskappy net drie maande geduur het. Volgende het Jojakim aan bewind gekom, wat nie veel beter was nie.

Jojakim was 25 jaar oud toe hy koning geword het en hy het elf jaar in Jerusalem regeer.

Hy het gedoen wat verkeerd was vir die HERE, net soos sy voorouers gedoen het.

Gedurende Jojakim se regering het koning Nebukadnesar van Babel teen hom opgetrek. Jojakim het oorgegee en drie jaar lank aan hom belasting betaal, maar daarna teen Nebukadnesar in opstand gekom. Die HERE het bendes Galdeërs, Arameërs, Moabiete en Ammoniete teen Juda gestuur om dit te verwoes net soos die HERE deur sy dienaars die profete aangekondig het.

Toe Jojakim sterf, het sy seun Jojagin hom opgevolg.

Jojagin was agtien jaar oud toe hy koning geword het en hy het drie maande in Jerusalem regeer. Sy ma was Negusta, die dogter van Elnatan uit Jerusalem. Jojagin het gedoen wat verkeerd was vir die HERE, net soos sy pa gedoen het.

Gedurende Jojagin se bewind het die leer van koning Nebukadnesar van Babel opgetrek teen Jerusalem en dit beleër. Koning Nebukadnesar van Babel het self gedurende die beleg daar aangekom. Toe het koning Jojagin en sy ma, sy amptenare en sy offisiere hulle aan die koning van Babel oorgegee.

Tydens die agtste jaar van Nebukadnesar se bewind het hy Jojagin gevange geneem. Soos die HERE voorheen gesê het, het Nebukadnesar al die skatte van die HERE se tempel en die koninklike paleis gevat. Hy het al die goue artikels wat koning Salomo in die tempel gesit het,

stukkend gebreek. Koning Nebukadnesar het almal in Jerusalem weggevoer: al die offisiere, al die soldate – 10 000 in getal, al die ambagsmanne en smede. Net die armste mense is in die land agtergelaat.

Nebukadnesar het koning Jojagin, sy ma, sy vroue, sy amptenare en al die vooraanstaande mense van Jerusalem as gevangenes na Babel toe geneem. Hy het ook 7 000 van die weerbare manne en 1 000 vakmanne en smede, almal wat geskik was vir oorlog, saamgeneem na Babel toe. Daarna het die koning van Babel vir Mattanja, Jojagin se oom, as koning aangestel en sy naam na Sedekia verander.

God het toegelaat dat die magtige koning Nebukadnesar Jerusalem, Juda se laaste vesting van belofte en hoop, begin verwoes. Nebukadnesar het opdrag gegee dat 'n tweede, groter groep Israeliete in 597 v.C. na Babel weggevoer word. Onder hulle was 'n jong priester met die naam Esegiël, 'n man met 'n skerp intellek, ongelooftlike literêre talent en geestelike insig.

Esegiël het God se streng boodskap van oordeel aan sy medebannelinge meegedeel. Jerusalem het steeds gestaan, maar dit was die begin van die einde. In 'n visioen het Esegiël sy opdrag gekry en sy profetiese boodskap: ongeloof lei tot oordeel.

Op 31 Julie van my dertigste jaar was ek saam met die Judese ballinge langs die Kebarrivier in Babilonië. Die hemel het vir my oorgegaan en ek het visioene van God gesien.

Terwyl ek gekyk het, sien ek 'n groot storm na my toe aankom uit die noorde. Voor die storm was daar 'n reuse wolk waarin die weerlig slaan en 'n helder lig brand. Die vuur binne-in die wolk het soos gloeiende metaal geblink. Uit die middel van die wolk het vier lewende wesens gekom wat soos mense gelyk het, behalwe dat elkeen van hulle vier gesigte en twee paar vlerke gehad het.

Daar was 'n koepel bokant hulle koppe soos die horison. Dit het soos 'n kristal geblink, en dit was angswekkend. Onder hierdie oppervlakte was die vlerke van die wesens uitgestrek wat aan mekaar geraak het, en elkeen het ook twee vlerke gehad waarmee hulle hulle lywe bedek het. Wanneer hulle vlieg, het hulle vlerke gedreun soos golwe wat op die strand breek, of soos die stem van die Almagtige, of soos die geraas van 'n groot klomp soldate. En wanneer hulle stilstaan, het hulle die vlerke laat sak.

Daar het 'n stem gekom van bokant die koepel bo-oor die wesens se koppe, en hulle het hulle vlerke laat sak terwyl hulle tot stilstand kom. Bokant die koepel bo hulle koppe was daar iets soos 'n troon van blou saffier. Hoog bokant hierdie troon was daar 'n figuur wat soos 'n mens gelyk het. Van sy heupe af boontoe het sy lyf gegloei soos witwarm metaal. En van sy heupe af ondertoe het hy gelyk soos 'n baie helder vlam wat brand. Reg rondom hom was die lig so helder soos die glans van 'n reënboog tussen die wolke.

So het die heerlikheid van die HERE aan my verskyn. Toe ek dit sien, het ek op my gesig op die grond neergeval, en toe het ek gehoor dat iemand met my praat.

“Staan op, mensekind,” het die stem gesê. “Ek wil met jou praat.” Die Gees het oor my gekom terwyl Hy gepraat het en my op my voete geplaas. Ek het sorgvuldig na sy woorde geluister.

“Mensekind,” het Hy gesê, “Ek stuur jou na die volk Israel toe, 'n nasie wat teen My rebelleer. Hulle voorouers het al van die begin af teen My gerebelleer, en hulle is steeds tot vandag toe in opstand teen My. Hulle is 'n hardkoppige geslag wie se harte verhard is. Maar Ek stuur jou om vir hulle te gaan sê: ‘Dit is wat die oppermagtige HERE sê!’

“Mensekind, moenie vir hulle bang wees nie. Moenie vrees nie, selfs al steek hulle dreigemente soos skerp dorings en doringstruik, en al leef jy tussen skerpioene. Moenie skrik vir wat hulle sê nie en moenie vrees vir hoe hulle lyk nie. Onthou, hulle is 'n klomp opstandige mense. Gee my boodskap vir hulle, of hulle luister of nie. Maar hulle sal nie luister nie. Die hele spul is immers hardkoppig.”

Daar het toe weer 'n boodskap van die HERE gekom: “Mensekind, kyk in die rigting van die berge van Israel en profeteer teen hulle. Gee vir die berge van Israel hierdie boodskap van die oppermagtige HERE. Dit is wat die oppermagtige HERE vir die berge en heuwels, vir die klowe en valleie sê: Ek gaan oorlog op julle laat losbreek. En Ek gaan die heidense tempels op julle hoogtes vernietig. Al julle altare sal stukkend geslaan word, en julle wierookaltare sal uitmekaargetrek word. En Ek sal julle mense voor julle afgode doodmaak. Ek sal julle lyke voor julle afgode neergooi en julle bene voor julle altare verstrooi. Waar julle ook al bly, sal julle stede in puin hope verander en julle hoogtes vernietig word. Julle altare sal vernietig en verwoes word. Julle afgode sal stukkend geslaan word en verdwyn. Julle

wierookaltare sal uitmeekargeskop word. Daar sal niks oorbly van alles wat julle gemaak het nie. Die dag wanneer die hele plek vol lyke lê, sal julle weet dat Ek die HERE is.

“Tog sal Ek enkeles onder my mense aan die verwoesting laat ontsnap, en hulle sal onder die nasies van die wêreld verstrooi word. En wanneer hulle as ballinge tussen die nasies bly, sal hulle My onthou. Hulle sal raaksien hoe hartseer Ek gevoel het toe hulle ontrou was deur van My af weg te draai en agter ander gode aan te loop. En dan sal hulle hulleself haat oor al hulle boosheid en al hulle afskuwelike dade. Dan sal hulle erken dat Ek alleen die HERE is en dat Ek ernstig was toe Ek gedreig het dat al hierdie dinge met hulle gaan gebeur.

“Die oppermagtige HERE sê:

“Ramp na ramp
bring Ek oor jou!

“Mense van Israel,
die dag van jou vernietiging breek aan.
Die tyd het gekom.

Die dag van moeilikheid is naby!
Daardie dag sal daar verwarring wees,
nie vreugde nie.
Binnekort stort Ek my woede uit op jou.
Ek sal jou oordeel oor jou optrede.
Dan straf Ek jou vir jou afskuwelike gedrag.”

Op die tuisfront het dinge al slegter geword vir Jerusalem. Maar God het voortgegaan om sy mense te waarsku. 'n Ander profeet met die naam Jeremia is vir diens opgeroep in 'n baie interessante gesprek met God.

Die HERE het vir my 'n boodskap gegee. Hy het gesê:

“Ek ken jou nog voordat jy gevorm is
in die skoot van jou moeder.
Voor jou geboorte al het Ek jou gekies
en aangestel om namens My te praat
met die nasies van die wêreld.”

Ek het geantwoord: “Nee, oppermagtige HERE, ek kan nie goed praat

nie. Ek is ook te jonk!”

Maar die HERE het geantwoord en gesê: “Moenie sê jy is te jonk nie. Gaan na die mense waarheen Ek jou stuur en gee my boodskap vir hulle. Jy moet ook nie bang wees vir hulle nie. Ek sal by jou wees en jou beskerm! Ek is die HERE wat so sê.”

Toe het die HERE sy hand uitgesteek en aan my mond geraak. Hy het vir my gesê: “Ek het my woorde in jou mond gesit. Ek stel jou vandag aan oor nasies en regerings, om sommige te ontwortel en plat te slaan, om ander op te bou en nuut te vestig.

“Ek beskerm jou teen hulle. Ek maak jou soos ’n versterkte stad, so vasgeanker soos ’n ysterpaal of soos ’n muur wat van koper gemaak is. Jy sal sterk genoeg wees om jou teen die konings van Juda, hulle amptenare, hulle priesters en enige van die land se mense te handhaaf. Hulle sal jou probeer onderkry, maar dit nie regkry nie. Ek is aan jou kant en sal jou beskerm. Ek, die HERE, belowe dit!”

Omdat hy geweet het God is met hom, kon Jeremia alle vrese afgooi. Bekend as die “huilende profeet” het Jeremia die swaar las van die mense se sonde en die komende oordeel gevoel. Dit het nie gehelp dat sy boodskap onwelkom of ongewens was nie. Hy het vertel van die komende verwoesting van Jerusalem, God se oordeel oor die mense se sondes van afgodsaanbidding en trots.

Maar Jeremia het ook ’n ander waarheid geken en van vertel: God se oneindige genade, alhoewel uitstel van die straf onvermydelik gelyk het. Ten spyte van al die verkrummelde geboue, lewensverlies in ongelukkige oorloë en lewens weggegooi weens die najaag van heidense plesiere, was God se genade durend – teer genade wat uitgestort sal word op ’n nasie wat Hom verlaat het. Vir die God van majestueuse liefde is niks onmoontlik nie.

Luister na die boodskap van die HERE, huis van Jakob,
luister, al die families van Israel!

“Het ’n volk ooit hulle gode
vir ander gode verruil
al is hulle nie regtig gode nie?
Tog het my mense My verruil
vir gode wat niks werd is nie!
Wees geskok, o hemele!
Krimp ineen van afgryse,”

sê die HERE.

“My volk het twee bose dinge gedoen:

Hulle het My verlaat,

die fontein wat lewe gee.

En hulle het vir hulle bakke uitgekap,

bakke wat nie water hou nie.

“Lank gelede het Ek die juk gebreek waarmee jy moes ploeg.

Ek het die kettings van slawerny van jou afgehaal,
maar jy het gesê: ‘Ek sal Hom nie dien nie.’

“Ek het jou geplant as ’n uitgesoekte wingerdstok,
opreg gekweek!

Hoe het julle dan verander

in ’n wilde druiwestok?

Al was julle julleself ook met groot hoeveelhede seep

en met die sterkste wasmiddels, dit sal nie help nie.

Vir My sal al julle skuld soos vuil vlekke bly,”

sê die oppermagtige HERE!

“Soos ’n dief wat betrap word in die skande kom,
so sal Israel – sy konings,

leiers, priesters en profete – in die skande kom.

Hulle sê vir ’n beeld uit hout gesny: ‘Jy is my pa.’

En vir ’n beeld uit klip gekap: ‘Jy is my ma.’

Hulle steur hulle glad nie aan My nie,

maar sodra hulle in die moeilikheid is, roep hulle:

‘Kom help ons!’

Hoekom vra julle nie hulp

by hierdie gode wat julle gemaak het nie?

As hulle kan, laat hulle julle

uit die moeilikheid help!

Juda, julle het net soveel gode

as dorpe.

“Verkondig dit in Juda, vertel dit in Jerusalem en sê:

‘Maak alarm sodat elkeen dit kan hoor!’

Skreeu hard en sê:

‘Laat almal byeenkom.

Laat ons skuil in die versterkte dorpe.’

Stuur ’n sein na Jerusalem en waarsku hulle:

‘Moenie wag nie, vlug vir julle lewens!’
Ek bring ’n groot ramp oor julle uit die noorde.”

’n Leeu het opgestaan uit sy lêplek.

Die verwoester is op pad.
Julle dorpe sal verwoes lê,
sonder enige inwoners.
Trek julle rouklere aan
en weeklaag,
want die woede van die HERE
is teen ons gerig.

“Hardloop op en af in die strate van Jerusalem.

Kyk oral rond
en soek op die pleine!
As julle net een persoon kan kry
wat probeer reg lewe en eerlik is,
sal Ek die stad spaar.

“En as julle aanhou om ongehoorsaam te wees,
sal ek eenkant staan en huil
omdat julle so verwaand is.
Ek sal bitterlik huil omdat hulle
die kudde van die HERE in ballingskap wegneem.

“Sê vir die koning en sy ma:

‘Gaan sit baie laag, in die stof,
want julle pragtige kroon
sal van julle koppe weggeneem word.’
Die dorpe in die Negev sal hulle poorte sluit,
en niemand sal dit kan oopsluit nie.
En die mense van Juda sal as ballinge weggevoer word.
Almal van hulle sal in ballingskap gaan.”

Jeremia se woorde was duidelik, maar die konings wat vir Josia gevolg het, het geweier om te luister. Hulle het al meer verwaard geword en die profeet se waarskuwings en wysheid geïgnoreer. Hulle taktiek van valsheid en gierigheid was gedoem om te faal. Uiteindelik het Juda se konings te staan gekom voor Babel se volle militêre mag.

Die HERE die God van hulle voorouers het herhaaldelik sy profete

gestuur om hulle te waarsku, want Hy het medelye gehad met sy volk en sy woning, maar hulle het met die boodskappers van God gespot, sy woorde geminag en sy profete uitgelag totdat die woede van die HERE teen sy volk ontbrand het en daar vir hulle nie meer genesing was nie.

Sedekia was 21 jaar oud toe hy koning geword het. Hy het elf jaar in Jerusalem regeer. Hy het gedoen wat verkeerd was vir die HERE sy God en het nie berou gehad toe Jeremia die profeet die woorde van die HERE verkondig het nie. Hy het ook teen koning Nebukadnesar in opstand gekom al het hy 'n eed van getrouheid voor God afgelê. Sedekia was hardkoppig en onversetlik en het geweier om terug te draai na die HERE die God van Israel. Al die leiers van die priesters en die volk het al meer ontrou geword. Hulle het die heidense praktyke van die omringende nasies gevolg en die tempel van die HERE in Jerusalem, wat Hy geheilig het, ontheilig.

Dit was in die negende jaar van Sedekia se bewind in Jerusalem. Op die tiende dag van die tiende maand het koning Nebukadnesar van Babel met sy hele leër teen Jerusalem opgetrek. Hulle het by die stad kamp opgeslaan en beleëringswalles rondom teen die mure opgehoop. Jerusalem is beleër tot in die elfde jaar van koning Sedekia se bewind.

Teen die negende dag van die vierde maand was die hongersnood in die stad baie erg. Daar was nie meer kos vir die inwoners nie.

Op die oppervlak het dit voorgekom of God sy mense verlaat het. Waar was sy genade nou? Sedekia en sy vennote wou hê Jeremia moes intree en vir God om hulp vra. In plaas daarvan het Jeremia aangekondig dat nederlaag en die dood die gevolg sou wees van die mense se voortdurende sonde.

Die HERE het vir Jeremia nog 'n boodskap gegee om oor te dra. Dit was toe koning Sedekia vir Pasgur, die seun van Malkija en Sefanja, die seun van Maäseja, 'n priester, na hom toe gestuur het met 'n versoek: "Vra tog namens ons vir die HERE wat gaan gebeur. Koning Nebukadnesar van Babel is besig om met sy soldate teen ons op te trek. Miskien sal die HERE vir ons 'n wonderwerk doen soos Hy al tevore gedoen het en hom laat terugtrek."

Jeremia het hulle geantwoord: "Gaan sê vir koning Sedekia die HERE, die God van Israel sê: 'Op die oomblik is julle besig om buite die mure van die stad teen die koning van Babel en die Babiloniërs wat

julle omsingel het, te veg. Ek gaan julle wapens onbruikbaar maak. Ek gaan julle vyand in die hartjie van die stad laat inkom. Ek sal teen julle veg en julle sal my groot krag ervaar. Ek is verskriklik kwaad. Julle het My woedend gemaak! Ek gaan die inwoners van die stad met 'n epidemie tref. Mens en dier sal sterf. Nadat dit alles gebeur het, sê die HERE, sal koning Sedekia van Juda, sy amptenare en van die mense in die stad die oorlog, hongersnood en siektes oorleef. Maar Ek sal hulle uitlewer aan koning Nebukadnesar van Babel en aan hulle vyande wat hulle wil dood hê. Hy sal geen jammerte vir hulle voel nie, maar hulle met die swaard doodmaak. Hy sal geen genade vir hulle hê nie en niemand laat oorleef nie.'

"Sê vir die mense die HERE sê: 'Ek gee vir julle 'n keuse tussen lewe en dood. Mense wat kies om in hierdie stad te bly, sal óf in gevegte óf van siekte óf van honger doodgaan. Maar wie uitgaan en hulle aan die Babiloniërs oorgee, sal bly lewe. Ek het besluit om hierdie stad te vernietig. Ek gaan niks goeds vir hulle doen nie, sê die HERE. Ek sal die stad aan die koning van Babel oorgee. Hy sal die stad verbrand.'"

Toe is 'n opening in die stadsmuur gemaak waardeur al die soldate gedurende die nag ontsnap het. Hulle het deur die opening tussen die twee mure by die koning se tuin gevlug hoewel daar Galdeërs rondom die stad was, en het in die rigting van die Jordaanvallei gevlug. Maar die Galdese leer hulle agternagesit en die koning op die Jerigovlakte ingehaal. Teen hierdie tyd was al sy manskappe van hom af verstrooi.

Hulle het hom gevang en na die koning van Babel in Ribla gebring waar 'n vonnis oor hom uitgespreek is. Die koning van Babel het al sy seuns voor Sedekia doodgemaak. Daarna het hulle sy oë uitgesteek, hom met bronskettings geboei en na Babel toe geneem.

In die vyfde maand, op die sewende van die maand, in die negentiende jaar van koning Nebukadnesar se bewind in Babel, het Nebusaradan in Jerusalem aangekom. Hy was die hoof van die lyfwag en 'n amptenaar van die koning van Babel. Hy het die tempel van die HERE, die koninklike paleis, al die huise en al die belangrike geboue in Jerusalem afgebrand. Daarna het die Galdese soldate onder sy bevel die muur van Jerusalem afgebreek. Nebusaradan, hoof van die lyfwag, het verder die mense wat in die stad agtergebly het, dié wat na die koning van Babel oorgeloop het en almal wat oorgebly het, in ballingskap weggeneem. Hy het die armste mense in Juda laat agterbly om die wingerde en landerye te bewerk.

So is die mense van Juda uit hulle land in ballingskap weggevoer.

Jerusalem het geval. Maar die profeet Jeremia is nie gedeporteer nie. Nebukadnesar het hom eerder aangeraai om by die streek se nuwe goewerneur, Gedalja, te bly. Kort daarna is Gedalja vermoor. Baie Jode wat steeds in Juda was, het uit vrees vir Babel se wraak na Egipte gevlug en vir Jeremia gedwing om saam te gaan. (Joodse tradisie wil dit hê dat Jeremia met klippe doodgegooi is terwyl hy in Egipte gebly het.) Maar Jeremia se hart was altyd in die heilige stad van sy tuisland – eens besig met handel en gebed, nou leeg en stil. Jeremia het bitterlik gehuil vir sy mense.

Die stad wat vol mense was,
is nou verlate.
Sy sit alleen daar,
soos 'n weduwee wat treur.
Die stad wat eens die nasies se koningin was,
het nou hulle slaaf geword.

Sy sit dwarsdeur die nag en huil.
Trane loop oor haar wange.
Nie een van haar minnaars
wil haar nou kom troos nie.
Al haar vriende het haar verrai
en haar vyande geword.

Juda is weggevoer in ballingskap.
Hulle word verdruk en gedwing om te werk.
Hulle woon tussen vreemde volke
waar hulle nie tuis is nie.
Hulle agtervolgers het hulle ingehaal
en in 'n hoek vasgekeer.

Dit is die HERE wat dit met jou laat gebeur
wat Hy al lankal besluit het.
Hy het Jerusalem genadeloos vernietig.
Hy het jou vyand laat lekkerkry
toe hulle jou verslaan het.

Tog is daar een ding waarop ek kan reken
en waarop ek altyd sal hoop:

Deur die HERE se troue liefde is ons nie doodgemaak nie.

Hy hou nooit op om vir ons om te gee nie.

Sy genade het geen einde nie.

Op u ontferming kan 'n mens altyd vertrou.

Dit is elke oggend nuut.

Ek sê vir myself: “My lewe behoort aan die HERE.

Daarom vertrou ek op Hom.”

Die HERE is goed vir hulle wat op Hom wag

en Hom soek.

Dit is goed om geduldig te wag

totdat die HERE ons red.

HERE, hou 'n bietjie in gedagte wat met ons gebeur het.

Kyk hoe ons verneder is.

Vreugde het verdwyn uit ons harte.

Ons vrolike danse het in treursange verander.

Die kroon het van ons koppe geval.

Dit gaan sleg met ons, want ons het sonde gedoen.

U bly dieselfde, HERE, vir ewig en altyd.

U regeer van geslag tot geslag.

Hoekom hou U aan om van ons te vergeet?

Hoekom hou U so lank aan om ons te vermy?

Lei ons terug na U toe, HERE, sodat ons by U kan uitkom.

Maak ons lewe weer soos dit vroeër was.

Alhoewel Jeremia te staan gekom het voor hartseer en tragedie, het hy in God se genade vertrou – net soos Esegïël. Voordat Jerusalem voor die Babiloniërs geval het, het die profeet Esegïël die mense oor die komende verwoesting gewaarsku. En tog, toe Esegïël en sy medebannelinge in Babel die nuus hoor van Jerusalem se val, het sy boodskap in hoop verander. Alhoewel die mense hulle rug op God gedraai het, sou hulle weer 'n oorfloed onverdiende genade ontvang.

“Sê vir die mense van Israel die oppermagtige HERE sê: Ek bring julle terug, maar nie omdat julle dit verdien nie. Ek doen dit ter wille van my Naam wat julle oneer aangedoen het onder die nasies waar julle gebly het. Ek gaan julle wys hoe heilig Ek is, Ek vir wie die nasies

respek verloor het deur julle optrede. En as Ek my heiligheid deur julle voor hulle oë openbaar, sê die oppermagtige HERE, sal die nasies besef dat Ek die HERE is.

“Want Ek maak julle bymekaar uit al die nasies en bring julle huis toe na julle eie land toe. Dan was Ek julle met skoon water, en julle sal skoon wees. Ek maak julle skoon van julle vuilheid en julle afgode. Ek gee julle ’n nuwe hart met die regte begeertes en ’n nuwe gees. Ek vat die ou hart van sonde weg en gee julle ’n nuwe, gehoorsame hart. En Ek gee my Gees in julle sodat julle my voorskrifte sal gehoorsaam en doen wat Ek beveel. Julle sal in die land bly wat Ek aan julle voorouers gegee het. Julle sal my volk wees, en Ek sal julle God wees.

“So sê die oppermagtige HERE: Wanneer Ek julle skoonmaak van julle sondes, bring Ek mense om in julle stede te leef. Die puinhoop sal herbou word. In plaas daarvan dat dit kaalgestroop lê voor almal wat daar verbygaan, sal die verlate velde weer bewerk word. Wanneer Ek julle terugbring, sal mense sê: ‘Hierdie land wat godverlate was, is nou soos die Tuin van Eden! Die stede wat verlate in puin gelê het, is nou versterk en vol mense!’ Dan sal al die buurnasies wat oor is, besef dat Ek, die HERE, die puinhoop herbou het en die verlate landerye weer beplant het. Want Ek, die HERE, het dit belowe en Ek sal dit doen!”

Die HERE het my in besit geneem, en die Gees van die HERE het my weggeneem na ’n vallei vol bene. Hy het my tussen die ou, droë bene wat op die valleivloer lê, rondgelei. Hulle het oral op die grond gelê. Toe vra Hy: “Mensekind, kan hierdie bene weer lewende mense word?”

“Oppermagtige HERE, U alleen ken die antwoord,” het ek gesê.

Hy sê toe vir my: “Profeteer vir hierdie bene en sê: ‘Droë bene, luister na die woord van die HERE! So sê die oppermagtige HERE: Kyk, Ek gaan in julle blaas en julle weer lewend maak! Ek sit vleis en spiere om julle en maak julle toe met vel. Ek sit asem in julle en julle sal lewend word. Dan sal julle besef dat Ek die HERE is.’”

Ek het gesê soos Hy my beveel het. Skielik was daar ’n gedreun terwyl ek praat. Die bene van elke liggaam het bymekaargekom soos dit voorheen was. Terwyl ek gekyk het, het spiere en vleis oor die bene gevorm. Toe het vel die liggame toegemaak. Maar daar was nie lewe in hulle nie.

Toe sê Hy vir my: “Praat met die wind en sê: ‘So sê die oppermagtige HERE: Wind, kom vanuit die vier windrigtings! Blaas in hierdie dooie liggame sodat hulle lewend kan word!’” Ek het toe gesê

soos ek beveel is, en die wind het in die liggame gekom en hulle het begin asemhaal. Hulle het lewend geword en op hulle voete gaan staan, 'n groot klomp mense.

Toe sê Hy vir my: “Mensekind, hierdie bene is die mense van Israel. Hulle sê: ‘Ons het ou, droë bene geword. Daar is geen hoop vir ons oor nie!’ Sê vir hulle die oppermagtige HERE sê: My volk, Ek maak die grafte van ballingskap oop en laat julle opstaan. En Ek bring julle terug na die land Israel. My volk, wanneer dit gebeur en Ek julle uit julle grafte bring, dan sal julle besef dat Ek die HERE is. Ek sit my Gees in julle, en julle sal lewe en terugkeer huis toe, na julle eie land toe. Dan sal julle besef dat Ek die HERE is. Julle sal sien dat Ek presies gedoen het soos Ek belowe het. Ek, die HERE, het so gesê!”

18

Daniel in Exile

Daniel and three other young men were among those taken to Babylon in 605 BC as part of the first deportation of Jews prior to the fall of Jerusalem. These four have become the most well-known quartet of heroes in the Old Testament. They successfully adapted to the losses of home and family and survived the tough training in foreign etiquette. It's not hard to see how they quickly became the king's favorites.

THEN THE KING ORDERED ASHPENAZ, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility — young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel,

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.



But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.”

Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his

mind was troubled and he could not sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means."

Then the astrologers answered the king, "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."

Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."

The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans."

This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might

interpret the dream for him.

Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said:

“Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;

wisdom and power are his.

He changes times and seasons;

he deposes kings and raises up others.

He gives wisdom to the wise

and knowledge to the discerning.

He reveals deep and hidden things;

he knows what lies in darkness,

and light dwells with him.

I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:

You have given me wisdom and power,

you have made known to me what we asked of you,

you have made known to us the dream of the king.”

Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, “Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.”

Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, “I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.”

The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), “Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?”

Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these:

“As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.”

First, amazingly Daniel described the king's dream in every detail. His subsequent interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a history lesson using the king's magnificent dream statue as a visual aid. The head of the statue was gold. The figure's chest and arms were silver, the belly and thighs bronze, the legs iron and the feet a mix of iron and baked clay. Each part of the statue represented an empire.

The statue's gold head represented Nebuchadnezzar himself and his empire. He was chief among chiefs, leader of the known world, dazzling and incomparable. But not, unfortunately, permanent. Babylon would someday give way to an inferior but momentarily stronger power, the Medo-Persians under Cyrus. They would also fall—to the Greeks led by Alexander the Great. And then the Romans would come. The statue's feet made partly from iron and partly from clay could point to a globalized world of shifting power bases as history spins forward, while some Bible interpreters have found in the ten toes symbolic clues to our own future at the end of history.

For Nebuchadnezzar, though, the message was clear and simple: God directs history, and Babylon's power, prestige and privilege formed only a short chapter in a much longer story. Such news at the height of an empire's influence was bound to create a strong response.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to

him. The king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.”

Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

Daniel was gifted to interpret the meaning of dream images, but neither he nor his three buddies were authorized to bow down before idols. There was one thing they refused to adapt to—foreign worship practices that violated their commitment to God. In that regard they were holdouts, malcontents and lawbreakers. Nebuchadnezzar decided to erect a statue some 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. When the people were ordered to bow low and worship the statue, three men stood tall and refused to comply. The king was not happy ...

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever! Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon — Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego — who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and

asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”

They replied, “Certainly, Your Majesty.”

He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Pride regularly precedes a fall, but few world leaders fall as far as Nebuchadnezzar and then recover their power. The king had another spectacular dream, this time of a tree. Daniel was called in again and informed Nebuchadnezzar that the great tree represented the king himself. In the dream a loud voice issues a command to cut down the tree, symbolizing that the king would lose everything, becoming so deranged that his behavior will resemble a beast in the wild. One year later, as words of arrogant pride were on his lips, Nebuchadnezzar was struck suddenly with a mental/behavioral disorder that caused the most severe forms of disorientation. He lived in the bush, eating grass and acting like a common animal. Then, miraculously he was healed — which he credited to Daniel’s God — and returned to

Fast forward to the new king, Belshazzar, who ignored Daniel and dishonored Daniel's God. Once, at a gala party, Belshazzar poured his best wine into chalices taken from Jerusalem's holy temple, and his guests drank merrily in ridicule. At the height of the fun, suddenly a large and mysterious hand appeared and wrote something on the wall of the banquet chamber: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin.

The king was frightened and called in Daniel to make sense of it. The meaning of the writing on the wall was, "You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting." The king was great now, but soon he and his kingdom would become weak, Daniel warned. That very night, as the party waned, invading Persians rode victoriously through Babylon's gates and killed King Belshazzar.

So Daniel served yet another king and empire with honor and distinction. He became a top administrator under "Darius" — likely either the Babylonian throne name of King Cyrus of Persia or a name given to Cyrus's newly appointed governor over Babylon. But what happens when you mix a new ruler, jealous colleagues and prayer?

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, Your Majesty, issue

the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered — in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” So King Darius put the decree in writing.

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands — in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.”

So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”

A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”

The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:

“May you prosper greatly!

“I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

“For he is the living God
and he endures forever;

his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.

He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.

He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions.”

Even in exile a remnant of God’s faithful people was growing. The prophet Jeremiah was now dead, but perhaps his message still rang in their hearts—the message of God’s ultimate compassion and the promise of returning to their homeland. Though Jeremiah had

prophesied a cloud of gloom and doom, the “weeping prophet” of Judah had not ended the story in a minor key. Behind the pages of ruin and loss was one bright page of mercy, one last word of restoration that was bound up in the loving character of God. “This is what the Lord says ... I will save you.”

“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you. The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their ancestors to possess,’ says the LORD.

“‘In that day,’ declares the LORD Almighty,
‘I will break the yoke off their necks

and will tear off their bonds;
no longer will foreigners enslave them.

“‘So do not be afraid, Jacob my servant;
do not be dismayed, Israel,’

declares the LORD.

‘I will surely save you out of a distant place,
your descendants from the land of their exile.

Jacob will again have peace and security,
and no one will make him afraid.

I am with you and will save you,’
declares the LORD.

“Though I completely destroy all the nations
among which I scatter you,
I will not completely destroy you.

I will discipline you but only in due measure;
I will not let you go entirely unpunished.”

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “When I bring them back from captivity, the people in the land of Judah and in

its towns will once again use these words: ‘The LORD bless you, you prosperous city, you sacred mountain.’ People will live together in Judah and all its towns — farmers and those who move about with their flocks. I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.”

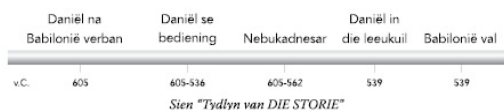
This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

Jeremiah’s words rang clear. Mighty Babylon did fall to Persian invaders in 539 BC. During the first year of his official reign over the kingdom, Cyrus, the great Persian overlord, issued a decree permitting Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem. Thus, a little less than 70 years after the first deportations began in 605 BC, a caravan of deportees retraced their steps, praising God each step of the way for guiding history toward his good end. They were going home!

Daniël in ballingskap

Daniël en drie ander jong mans was onder die mense wat in 605 v.C. na Babel geneem is as deel van die eerste gedeporteerde Jode voor die val van Jerusalem. Hierdie vier het die bekendste groep helde in die Ou Testament geword. Hulle het suksesvol aangepas by die verlies van huise en familie, en die moeilike opleiding in vreemde etiket oorleef. Dit is nie moeilik om te sien hoe hulle so vinnig die koning se gunsteling geword het nie.

Die koning het vir Aspenas, wat aan die hoof was van die paleisamptenare, opdrag gegee. Hy moes jong manne uit die koninklike families en vooraanstaandes van die Israeliete wat gevange geneem is na hom toe bring. Hulle moes gesond en aantreklik wees, goed ingelig en vinnig van begrip, geskik om in die koning se paleis diens te doen. Hulle moes ook verder onderrig word in die taal en letterkunde van die Babiloniërs. Die koning het opdrag gegee dat hulle elke dag kos en drank uit die paleis moes kry. Hulle moes drie jaar lank opgelei word sodat hulle aan die einde daarvan as adviseurs in sy diens kon staan.



Daniël, Gananja, Misael en Asarja was onder hierdie jong manne uit Juda. Die hoofamptenaar het vir hulle nuwe name gegee. Daniël het Beltsasar geword, Gananja Sadrag, Misael Mesag en Asarja Abednego.

Daniël het egter besluit dat hy nie homself met die koning se kos en drank gaan verontreinig nie. Hy het die hoofamptenaar versoek om nie daarvan te eet nie. God het gemaak dat die hoofamptenaar van Daniël hou en hom goedgesind is. Hy het egter vir Daniël gesê: “Ek is bang vir die koning. Hy het bepaal dat julle hierdie kos en drank moet gebruik. As hy sien dat julle nie so goed lyk soos die ander van julle ouderdom nie, gaan julle my kop laat rol by die koning.”

Daniël het toe vir die persoon onder wie se sorg die hoofamptenaar Daniël, Gananja, Misael en Asarja geplaas het, gesê: “Toets tog u dienaars vir tien dae lank. Gee vir ons net groente om te eet en water om te drink. Kyk dan ná tien dae hoe ons voorkoms vergelyk met die jong manne wat wel die koning se kos eet. U kan dan besluit om met u dienaars te maak soos u goeddink.” Hy het met Daniël ooreengekom en hulle tien dae lank op die proef gestel.

Aan die einde van die tien dae het Daniël-hulle beter en gesonder gelyk as die jong manne wat die koning se kos geëet het. Daarom het die amptenaar hulle vrygestel van die koning se kos en drank. Hy het vir hulle groente gegee om te eet.

God het vir hierdie vier jong manne kennis gegee, insig in dinge wat neergeskryf is en ook wysheid. Vir Daniël het hy die vermoë gegee om gesigte en drome te verstaan.

Toe die tyd om was wat die koning bepaal het, het die hoof van die amptenare al die jong manne voor Nebukadnesar gebring. Die koning het 'n onderhoud met elkeen van hulle gevoer. Hy het niemand onder hulle gekry wat die gelyke van Daniël, Gananja, Misael en Asarja was nie. Hulle is toe in die diens van die koning aangestel.

Hy het gevind dat hulle in sake wat wysheid en insig vereis, tien keer beter was as al die towenaars en voorspellers in sy hele koninkryk.

Daniël het daar gebly tot die eerste jaar waarin koning Kores regeer het.

In die tweede jaar wat Nebukadnesar as koning regeer het, het hy een nag 'n droom gehad. Dit het hom so ontstel dat hy nie verder kon slaap nie. Hy het sy towenaars, voorspellers, besweerders en sterrekykers laat kom om sy droom te verklaar. Hulle het toe gekom en voor die koning kom staan. Hy het vir hulle gesê: “Ek het 'n droom gehad wat my baie ontstel het. Ek wil weet wat die droom beteken.”

Die sterrekykers het toe die koning in Aramees geantwoord: “Mag die koning lank leef! Sê vir ons wat u gedroom het en ons sal dit uitleë.”

Die koning het vir hulle gesê: “Ek het vas besluit dat as julle nie sowel die droom as sy verklaring vir my gee nie, julle liggame in stukke gekap sal word en van julle huise ashope gemaak sal word. As julle wel vir my sê wat ek gedroom het en wat dit beteken, sal ek julle met geskenke beloon en julle vereer. Sê vir my wat ek gedroom het en wat dit beteken!”

Hulle sê toe weer vir die koning: “Sê net vir u dienaars wat u

gedroom het, dan sal ons kan sê wat dit beteken.”

Die koning sê toe: “Dis vir my duidelik dat julle probeer tyd wen. Julle het gesien dat my besluit vasstaan. As julle nie vir my sê wat ek gedroom het nie, bly daar net een ding vir julle oor. Julle sweer saam om aan my leuens te verkoop in die hoop dat ek die besluit sal verander. Sê vir my wat ek gedroom het, dan sal ek weet dat julle ook kan verklaar wat dit beteken.”

Die sterrekykers het toe reguit vir die koning gesê: “Daar is nie ’n mens op aarde wat kan doen wat die koning vra nie. Geen koning, hoe sterk en magtig ook al, het al ooit so iets van enige towenaar, besweerder of sterrekyker vereis nie. Wat die koning eis, is onmoontlik. Daar bestaan niemand behalwe die gode wat kan sê wat die koning gedroom het nie. En die gode woon nie tussen mense nie.”

Die koning het toe so kwaad geword dat hy opdrag gegee het dat al sy raadgewers in Babel tereggestel moet word. ’n Wet is toe uitgevaardig dat hulle almal doodgemaak moet word. Daniël en sy vriende is ook gesoek om tereggestel te word.

Daniël het toe Arjok, hoof van die koning se lyfwag, taktvol en diplomaties genader. Arjok se opdrag was om al die raadgewers in Babel dood te maak. Hy het vir Arjok uitgevra: “Waarom is die opdrag van die koning so onverbiddelik?” Arjok het vir Daniël verduidelik waarom dit gaan. Daniël het toe dadelik na die koning gegaan en uitstel gevra om die koning se droom te verklaar.

Toe is Daniël na sy huis toe waar hy sy vriende Gananja, Misael en Asarja hiervan vertel het. Hy het hulle gevra om saam met hom by die God van die hemel te pleit vir hulp om die geheim van die droom te ontrafel sodat Daniël en sy vriende nie saam met die res van die raadgewers in Babel doodgemaak word nie. Die oplossing van die geheim is in ’n gesig in die nag vir Daniël gegee. Daniël het toe die God van die hemel geloof en gesê:

“Loof die Naam van God vir altyd, ja, altyd;
aan Hom behoort wysheid en krag;
Hy bepaal die gang van wêreldgebeure.
Hy sit konings af en stel konings aan;
Hy gee wysheid vir dié wat wys is
en kennis vir dié wat insig het;
Hy openbaar geheime wat diep en weggesteek is;
Hy weet wat in die donker gebeur
alhoewel daar by Hom lig is.
Ek loof en prys U, God van my voorouers.

U het my wysheid en krag gegee;
U het my ingelig oor wat ons van U gevra het;
U het aan my openbaar wat die koning gevra het.”

Daniël is toe na Arjok toe wat die opdrag van die koning gehad het om die raadgewers in Babel dood te maak. Hy het vir hom gesê: “Moenie die raadgewers van Babel doodmaak nie. Bring my voor die koning dat ek sy droom vir hom kan uitleê.”

Arjok het Daniël toe haastig na die koning toe gevat en vir hom gesê: “Ek het ’n man onder die Judese ballinge gekry wat die koning se droom kan uitleê.”

Die koning vra vir Daniël, wat ook as Beltsasar bekend was: “Is dit waar? Kan jy regtig vir my sê wat ek gedroom het en wat dit beteken?”

Daniël sê toe vir die koning: “Daar is geen raadgewer, besweerder, towenaar of sterrekyker wat die geheim vir die koning kan verklaar nie. Die God van die hemel kan egter geheime verklaar. Hy het vir koning Nebukadnesar bekendgemaak wat aan die einde van die dae sal gebeur. Die droom wat u gehad het en die gesigte wat u daar op u bed gesien het, is die volgende:

“U het daar op u bed gelê en dink oor die toekoms. God wat geheime bekendmaak, het u ingelig oor wat gaan gebeur. Die geheim is vir my verklaar, nie omdat ek slimmer is as enigiemand anders nie, maar omdat God wil hê dat die koning moet verstaan waaroor hy gedink het.”

Eerstens beskryf Daniël op wonderbaarlike wyse die koning se droom in detail. Sy daaropvolgende interpretasie van Nebukadnesar se droom was ’n geskiedenisles waarin die koning se fantastiese droomstandbeeld as visuele hulpmiddel gebruik is. Die standbeeld se kop was van goud. Die standbeeld se bors en arms van silwer, sy maag en bobene van brons, die bene van yster en sy voete van ’n mengsel van yster en gebakte klei. Elke deel van die standbeeld het ’n ryk verteenwoordig.

Die standbeeld se goue kop het vir Nebukadnesar en sy eie ryk verteenwoordig. Hy was die hoof van die hoofde, leier van die onbekende wêreld, skitterend en onvergelykbaar. Maar ongelukkig nie permanent nie. Babel sal eendag plek maak vir ’n ondergeskikte maar tydelike sterker mag, die Mede-Perse onder Kores. Hulle sou ook val – voor die Grieke wat deur Aleksander die Grote gelei is. En dan sou die Romeine aan bewind kom. Die standbeeld se voete wat gedeeltelik van

yster en gedeeltelik van klei gemaak was, kon heenwys na 'n globaliserende wêreld van veranderlike magsbasisse soos die geskiedenis vorentoe beweeg het, terwyl sommige Bybelinterpreteerders simboliese leidrade in die tien tone gevind het wat heenwys na ons eie toekoms aan die einde van die geskiedenis.

Vir Nebukadnesar was die boodskap egter duidelik en eenvoudig: God rig die geskiedenis, en Babel se mag, prestige en voorregte maak maar net 'n klein deeltjie uit van 'n baie langer storie. Sulke nuus op die hoogtepunt van 'n ryk se invloed sou natuurlik sterk reaksie uitlok.

Koning Nebukadnesar het toe diep voor Daniël gebuig en aan hom eer bewys. Hy het opdrag gegee om offers vir Daniël te bring en wierook vir hom te brand. Die koning het vir Daniël gesê: “Sowaar, jou God is die God van alle gode en die Heer van alle konings. Hy openbaar geheime, want jy kon die geheim vir my verklaar.”

Die koning het toe vir Daniël bevorder en vir hom baie geskenke gegee. Hy het Daniël as regeerder oor die provinsie van Babel aangestel en as leier van al sy raadgewers in Babel. Op versoek van Daniël het die koning vir Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego in beheer geplaas van die administrasie van die provinsie van Babel. Daniël self het in die poorte van die paleis aangebly.

Daniël het oor die gawe beskik om drome te interpreteer, maar nie hy of sy drie vriende het toestemming gehad om voor afgode te buig nie. Daar was een ding waarby hulle geweier het om aan te pas – heidense aanbiddingspraktyke wat hulle verbintenis aan God skend. In daardie opsig was hulle uithouers, ontevredenes en wetsoortreders. Nebukadnesar het besluit om 'n standbeeld op te rig – 30 meter hoog en drie meter breed. Toe die mense beveel is om laag te buig en die standbeeld te aanbid, het drie mans regop gestaan en geweier om te gehoorsaam. Die koning was nie gelukkig nie.

Koning Nebukadnesar het 'n beeld uit goud laat maak. Dit was 30 meter hoog en drie meter breed. Hy het dit in die Duravlake in die provinsie van Babel laat oprig. Nebukadnesar het toe opdrag aan al sy amptenare, hoofgoewerneys, goewerneys, raadgewers, skatmeesters, regters, magistrate en al die amptenare van die provinsies gegee om bymekaar te kom vir die ingebruikneming van die beeld wat hy laat oprig het. Al die amptenare, hoofgoewerneys, goewerneys, raadgewers, skatmeesters, regters, magistrate en die amptenare van die provinsies het toe bymekaargekom vir die inwyding van die beeld

wat koning Nebukadnesar laat oprig het. Hulle het voor die beeld gaan staan.

'n Aankondiger het hardop uitgeroep: “Luister na dié bevel, alle volke, nasies en tale: Sodra julle die trompet hoor blaas en die fluit, siter, lier, harp en ander blaas- en musiekinstrumente hoor, moet julle neerval en tot die goue beeld bid wat koning Nebukadnesar laat oprig het. Enigeen wat nie neerkniel om dit te aanbid nie, sal dadelik binne in 'n vuurwarm oond gegooi word.”

Die oomblik toe die mense uit die verskillende volke, nasies en tale die trompet, fluit, siter, harp en die ander musiekinstrumente hoor, het hulle op hulle knieë gegaan en die goue beeld aanbid wat koning Nebukadnesar laat oprig het.

Van die wyse manne het toe na die koning gegaan en van die Judeërs aangekla. Hulle het vir koning Nebukadnesar gesê: “Mag die koning lank lewe! U Majesteit het mos 'n bevel uitgereik dat elkeen wat die geluid van die trompet, fluit, siter, lier, harp of enige ander musiekinstrument hoor, dadelik moet neerval en die goue beeld aanbid. Dié wat dit nie doen nie, sal in die vuuroond gegooi word. Maar daar is Joodse mans wat nie doen wat die koning gelas het nie. Dit is Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego wat u oor die administrasie van die provinsie van Babel aangestel het. Hulle gee nie eer aan u gode nie en hulle aanbid nie die goue beeld wat u opgerig het nie.”

Nebukadnesar was woedend en hy het beveel dat Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego na hom toe gebring moet word. Toe hulle voor die koning kom, het Nebukadnesar vir hulle gevra: “Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego, is dit waar dat julle nie aan my gode eer wil bewys nie en nie die goue beeld wat ek opgerig het, wil aanbid nie? Kyk, ek gee julle nog een keer kans. Luister wanneer julle die musiekinstrumente hoor speel en aanbid die beeld wat ek gemaak het. As julle dit nie aanbid nie, sal julle onmiddellik in die vlamme oond gegooi word. Watter god sal julle dán uit my hand kan red?”

Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego het koning Nebukadnesar geantwoord: “Ons ag dit nie nodig om u hierop te antwoord nie. Die God wat ons aanbid, kán ons uit die vuur red. Hy sal ons uit u mag bevry, U Majesteit. En selfs al red Hy ons nie, U Majesteit, sal ons nie u gode vereer nie. Ons sal nie die goue beeld wat u gemaak het, aanbid nie.”

Die koning was so kwaad vir Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego dat sy gesig vertrek het. Hy het opdrag gegee dat die oond sewe keer warmer as gewoonlik gemaak moet word. Hy het sterk mans uit sy leer aangesê om Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego vas te bind en hulle in die

oond met sy skroeiende vlamme te gooi. Hulle het toe die drie mans vasgebind en hulle in die brandende oond gegooi met hulle klere en al. Omdat die koning beveel het dat die vuur so warm gemaak moet word, het die vlamme uit die oond die mense doodgebrand wat Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego in die oond gegooi het. Die drie mans, Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego, het so vasgebind in die brandende oond beland.

Koning Nebukadnesar was egter verstom. Hy het opgespring en vir sy raadgewers gevra: “Was dit nie drie mans wat ons vasgebind het en in die vuur gegooi het nie?”

“Ja, beslis, U Majesteit,” het hulle vir hom gesê.

Hy sê toe vir hulle: “Ek sien dan vier mans in die oond rondloop. Hulle is nie vasgebind nie. Hulle makeer niks. Die vierde een lyk soos ’n bo-aardse wese.”

Nebukadnesar het so naby hy kan aan die deur van die vlamme oond gaan staan. Hy het geroep: “Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego, dienaars van God die Allerhoogste, kom uit en kom hier na my toe!”

Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego het toe uit die vlamme oond gekom. Die amptenare, hoofgoewerneys, goewerneys en ministers van die koning het om hulle saamgedrom. Hulle het gesien dat die vuur niks aan hulle gemaak het nie. Die hare op hulle kop was nie eers geskroei nie. Hulle klere het niks oorgekome nie en hulle het nie na rook geruik nie.

Nebukadnesar het gesê: “Loof die God van Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego! Hy het sy engel gestuur om sy dienaars wat op Hom vertrou het, te red. Hulle het die koning se bevel verontagsaam en was bereid om hulle lewens te gee eerder as om eer te bewys aan enige ander god of enigeen buite hulle eie God te dien. Ek vaardig nou ’n wet uit dat enige volk, nasie of taal wat sonder respek oor Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego se God praat, in stukke gekap word, en van hulle huise sal ’n ashoop gemaak word. Daar is geen ander god wat so kan red soos Hy nie!”

Daarna het hy Sadrag, Mesag en Abednego bevorder en nog hoër posisies aan hulle in die provinsie van Babel gegee.

Hoogmoed kom dikwels tot ’n val, maar min wêreldleiers val so ver as Nebukadnesar en herwin dan hulle mag. Die koning het nog ’n wonderlike droom gehad, hierdie keer van ’n boom. Daniël is weer ingeroep en het vir Nebukadnesar meegedeel dat die groot boom die koning self verteenwoordig. In die droom gee ’n harde stem opdrag dat die boom afgekap moet word. Dit simboliseer dat die koning alles

sal verloor en so waansinnig sal word dat sy gedrag soos 'n wilde dier s'n sal wees. Een jaar later, terwyl daar woorde van arrogante trots op sy lippe was, is Nebukadnesar skielik getref met 'n geestelike/gedragsafwyking wat die ergste vorm van verwardheid veroorsaak het. Hy het in die veld gebly, gras geëet en soos 'n dier opgetree. En skielik word hy wonderbaarlik genees – wat hy toegeskryf het aan Daniël se God – en keer as 'n heel man terug na Babel se paleis.

'n Paar jaar later is daar 'n nuwe koning, Belsasar, wat vir Daniël geïgnoreer het en oneerbiedig opgetree het teenoor Daniël se God. Eenkeer het Belsasar op 'n partytjie vir hom wyn geskink in die bekere wat uit Jerusalem se heilige tempel geneem is, en hy en sy gaste het spottende daaruit gedrink. Op die hoogtepunt van die partytjie het daar skielik 'n groot en misterieuse hand verskyn wat iets teen die muur van die banketsaal geskryf het: “Mene, mene, tekël, ufarsin.”

Die koning was baie bang en het vir Daniël laat roep om die woorde te kom verklaar. Die woorde het die volgende betekenis gehad: “U is op die skaal geweeg en te lig gevind.” Die koning was nou sterk, maar binnekort sou hy en sy koninkryk swak word, het Daniël gewaarsku. Daardie selfde nag, soos die partytjie einde se kant toe gestaan het, het Persiërs wat die land ingeval het oorwinnend deur Babel se hekke gery en koning Belsasar doodgemaak.

Daniël het toe nog 'n koning en ryk met eerbied en uitmuntenheid gedien. Hy het 'n top-administrateur geword onder “Darius” – waarskynlik die Babiloniese troonnaam vir koning Kores van Persië of 'n naam gegee aan Kores se nuutaangestelde goewerneur oor Babel. Maar wat gebeur wanneer jy 'n nuwe leier meng met jaloerse kollegas en gebed?

Darius het dit goedgevind om 120 amptenare oor sy koninkryk aan te stel. Oor hulle het hy drie hoofde aangestel as toesighouers wat na die koning se belange moes omsien. Daniël was een van die drie. Daniël was besonder bekwaam en het homself van die amptenare en die ander hoofde onderskei. Die koning het selfs oorweeg om hom oor sy hele ryk aan te stel. Die amptenare en hoofde het toe begin fout soek om iets oor sy werk teen Daniël in te bring. Hulle kon nêrens enige fout kry nie. Daniël was betroubaar en daar kon niks gekry word waarin hy nalatig was nie. Omdat hulle niks teen hom kon kry nie, het hierdie mense toe besluit dat hulle op grond van sy godsdiens iets teen hom sou kry.

'n Groep van die amptenare en hoofde is toe na die koning toe. Hulle sê vir hom: “Koning Darius, mag u nog lank lewe! Al die hoofde

in die ryk, die hoofgoewerneurs, die hoofamptenare, die raadgewers en die goewerneurs beveel by u aan dat die koning 'n dekreet uitvaardig en bekragtig dat enigeen wat gedurende die volgende 30 dae enige god of mens behalwe die koning vereer, in 'n hok met leeus gegooi sal word. U Majesteit moet die wet opstel en dit onderteken sodat dit kan staan as wet van Mede en Perse wat nie verander kan word nie.” Koning Darius het die wet uitgevaardig en dit onderteken.

Toe Daniël hoor dat die wet onderteken is, het hy huis toe gegaan. Hy het daar 'n venster gehad wat oop was in die rigting van Jerusalem. Hy het daar drie maal 'n dag op sy knieë gegaan om tot sy God te bid en om Hom te loof, soos hy gewoon was om te doen. Die amptenare het toe bymekaargekom en op Daniël afgekom waar hy besig was om tot sy God te bid. Hulle is na die koning toe oor die wet wat hy gemaak het. Hulle vra vir hom: “Het u nie die wet onderteken dat enige persoon wat gedurende die volgende 30 dae tot enige god of mens bid, behalwe tot u, vir die leeus gegooi sal word nie?”

Die koning antwoord: “Ja, ek het. 'n Wet van Mede en Perse kan nooit verander word nie.”

Hulle sê toe vir die koning: “Daniël, een van die Judese ballinge steur hom nie aan u of aan u wet nie. Hy bid drie maal elke dag.” Toe die koning dit hoor, was hy baie kwaad vir homself. Hy het gedink oor hoe hy Daniël kon red. Hy het die res van die dag probeer om Daniël te bevry.

Die mans is weer saam na die koning toe. Hulle sê vir hom: “O Koning, u weet tog dat 'n wet wat die koning geteken het volgens die reël van Mede en Perse vas staan. Dit kan nie verander word nie.”

Die koning het toe beveel dat Daniël gevange geneem en in die leeuhoek gegooi moet word. Hy het vir Daniël gesê: “Mag jou God wat jy altyd dien jou red.”

Hulle het 'n klip gebring en dit voor die ingang van die hok gesit. Die koning het dit met sy seëlring en die seël van sy vooraanstaande amptenare verseël sodat niemand daarmee kon peuter en Daniël uithaal nie. Die koning is toe terug na sy paleis toe. Hy het daardie aand niks geëet nie. Daar is nie soos gewoonlik vir hom musiek gemaak nie. Hy kon ook nie daardie nag slaap nie.

Met dagbreek die volgende oggend het hy haastig na die leeus se hok toe gegaan. Naby die hok het hy angstig na Daniël geroep en gevra: “Daniël, dienaar van die lewende God, kon jou God wat jy altyd aanbid, jou van die leeus red?”

Daniël het die koning geantwoord: “Mag die koning lank lewe! My

God het sy boodskapper gestuur. Hy het die leeus se bekke toegesluit sodat hulle niks aan my kon doen nie, want ek het niks verkeerds teen Hom gedoen nie. Ook teen die koning het ek geen oortreding begaan nie.”

Die koning was baie bly hieroor. Hy het gesê dat Daniël uit die hok gehaal moes word. Daniël is daar uitgehaal en daar was geen skrapie aan hom nie, want hy het op sy God vertrou.

Die koning het toe beveel dat daardie mans wat Daniël wou verontreg, saam met hulle kinders en vroue in die leeuhoek gegooi moes word. Hulle het skaars grond gevat in die hok of die leeus het hulle verskeur.

Koning Darius het toe aan al die volke, nasies en tale oor die hele aarde ’n brief geskryf:

“Hartlike groete vir julle almal!

“Ek vaardig ’n bevel uit dat in al die gebiede van my ryk daar agting en respek moet wees vir die God van Daniël.

“Hy is die God wat lewe
en vir altyd bestaan.
Sy koninkryk ken geen einde nie
en sy regering het geen grense nie.
Hy bevry en Hy red.
Hy rig tekens op en doen wonders
bo in die hemel en onder op die aarde.
Hy het Daniël gered
uit die mag van die leeus.”

Selfs in ballingskap het ’n groepie van God se getroue mense gegroei. Die profeet Jeremia was nou dood, maar miskien het sy boodskap nog in hulle harte weerklink – die boodskap van God se omgee en die belofte van die terugkeer na hulle tuisland. Alhoewel Jeremia se profesieë baie donker was, het die “treurende profeet” van Juda se storie nie in ’n mineurtoonaard geëindig nie. Agter die bladsye van verwoesting en verlies was daar een helder bladsy van genade, een laaste woord van herstel wat opgesluit was in die liefdevolle karakter van God. “Dit is wat die Here sê ... Ek sal julle red.”

“Die HERE, die God van Israel, sê: Alles wat Ek vir jou sê, moet jy in ’n boek neerskryf. Die tyd kom dat Ek die omstandighede van my volk

Israel en Juda sal verander. Ek sal hulle laat terugkom na hierdie land wat Ek vir hulle voorouers gegee het sodat hulle dit weer in besit kan neem. Ek, die HERE, sê dit!”

“Daardie dag,” sê die HERE, die Almagtige,
“sal Ek die juk breek wat op julle nekke is
en julle boeie verwyder.
Geen vreemdeling sal meer oor julle baasspeel nie.”

Die HERE sê:

“Israel, my kneg, moenie bang
of verskrik wees nie.
Ek sal julle verlos uit ver plekke,
en julle nageslag uit ballingskap.
Israel sal terugkeer, en weer rus en vrede in hulle eie land hê.
Niemand sal hulle bangmaak nie.
Ek is by julle en Ek sal julle red, sê die HERE.
Ek sal die nasies vernietig
onder wie Ek julle verstrooi het,
maar julle sal Ek nie vernietig nie.
Ek dissiplineer julle.
Ek kan julle nie ongestraf laat nie.”

Die HERE, die Almagtige, die God van Israel, sê: “As Ek hulle terugbring uit hulle ballingskap, sal die mense in Juda en in hulle dorpe weer sê: ‘Die HERE seën jou, tuiste van geregtigheid, heilige berg!’ Al die mense in die dorpe en in die gebied van Juda, die boere en die herders, sal in rus en vrede saambly. Want Ek sal nuwe krag gee aan dié wat moeg is en die swakkes versterk.”

So sê die HERE: “Julle sal 70 jaar lank in Babel wees. Maar as die tyd verstryk het, sal Ek al die goeie beloftes begin vervul. Ek sal julle na julle land toe terugbring. Ek weet wat Ek vir julle beplan het,” sê die HERE. “Ek beplan voorspoed vir julle, nie teëspoed nie. Ek wil hê dat julle hoop vir die toekoms moet hê. Julle sal na My roep en bid, en Ek sal na julle luister. As julle heelhartig na My soek, sal julle My vind. Julle sal My toeganklik vind,” sê die HERE. “Ek sal julle uit gevangenskap laat terugkeer. Ek sal julle versamel tussen al die nasies waar julle nou is en uit al die plekke waarheen Ek julle verban het,” sê die HERE. “Ek sal julle weer terugbring na die plekke waarvandaan Ek julle in ballingskap laat gaan het.”

Jeremia se woorde het waar geword. Die magtige Babel het geval voor Persiese invallers in 539 v.C. Tydens die eerste jaar van sy amptelike bewind oor die koninkryk, het Kores, 'n groot Persiese leier, 'n dekreet uitgevaardig wat alle Joodse bannelinge toegelaat het om terug te keer na Jerusalem. In 'n bietjie minder as 70 jaar ná die eerste deportasies in 605 v.C. begin het, het 'n karavaan gedeporteerdes teruggekeer na hulle land en God elke tree van die pad geprys omdat Hy die geskiedenis na 'n goeie einde gelei het. Hulle was op pad huis toe.

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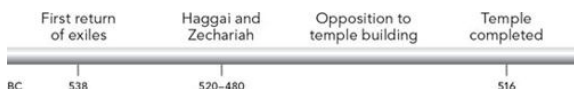
The Return Home

IN THE FIRST YEAR of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

“This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:

“The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”

Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites — everyone whose heart God had moved — prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.



Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god.

In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 200 male and female singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys.

The Babylonians appointed Zerubbabel, grandson of Jehoiachin, Judah's next-to-last king, as governor of Judah—making him the last of the line of David to be entrusted with political authority. Around 537 BC, Zerubbabel led these nearly 50,000 people back home to begin their rebuilding mission. With long, hard labor ahead of them, the people remembered to put first things first. With courage and conviction, they rebuilt the altar first, and then laid the foundation for the house of God. True worship was again a reality.

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled together as one in Jerusalem. Then Joshua son of Jozadak and his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God. Despite their fear of the peoples around them, they built the altar on its foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening sacrifices. Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the Festival of Tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings prescribed for each day. After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred festivals of the LORD, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to the LORD.

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD:

“He is good;
his love toward Israel endures forever.”

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the LORD, the God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, “Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.”

But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, “You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.”

Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. They bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Thus the work on the house of God in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

The returnees' initial success alarmed the Samaritans and other neighbors who feared what a rebuilt temple in a thriving Jewish state might mean to the political stability of the area. They therefore opposed the project vigorously, hindering the work for about six years and stopping it completely for another ten years. Weary of the resistance and fighting, the Israelites began thinking that maybe this wasn't the right time to build the Lord's house after all. Instead, they concentrated on their own homes and settling down. But God had different plans. Once again intervening, he sent his prophets to jump-

start the temple project. Haggai's message helped shake the people out of their complacency.

In the second year of King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest:

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “These people say, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the LORD’s house.’”

Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: “Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?”

Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build my house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,” says the LORD. “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?” declares the LORD Almighty. “Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the olive oil and everything else the ground produces, on people and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands.”

Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD.

Then Haggai, the LORD’s messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: “I am with you,” declares the LORD. So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit

of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.

Haggai continued his prophetic message of encouragement. God had not forgotten his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he said. And he hinted at a glorious future promise that sounded too good to be true—a promise that would ultimately be fulfilled when Jesus the Messiah visited this temple.

In the second year of King Darius, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: “Speak to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, to Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, ‘Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing? But now be strong, Zerubbabel,’ declares the LORD. ‘Be strong, Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘and work. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.’

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”

Zechariah, a prophet and priest, began his work in Jerusalem in 520 BC, during the time of Haggai’s ministry. Both men wanted to stimulate renewal in the temple rebuilding project. Like Haggai, Zechariah had a dual message: The temple is important, but it’s a sign and symbol of something greater coming. Work on the temple; don’t be afraid. But watch for the day when God will bless Jerusalem once again.

In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the

LORD came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.”

This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?” declares the LORD Almighty.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Now hear these words, ‘Let your hands be strong so that the temple may be built.’ This is also what the prophets said who were present when the foundation was laid for the house of the LORD Almighty. Before that time there were no wages for people or hire for animals. No one could go about their business safely because of their enemies, since I had turned everyone against their neighbor. But now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past,” declares the LORD Almighty.

“The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. Just as you, Judah and Israel, have been a curse among the nations, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Just as I had determined to bring disaster on you and showed no pity when your ancestors angered me,” says the LORD Almighty, “so now I have determined to

do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid. These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against each other, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.

The word of the LORD Almighty came to me.

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going.’ And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him.”

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

Thanks to Haggai’s and Zechariah’s encouragement, the people returned to their work on the temple. However, they were not the only ones back at work. So was their opposition, this time from Tattenai, the governor of the Trans-Euphrates region. But the people could not have anticipated what God would do next.

At that time Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and She-thar-Bozenai and their associates went to them and asked, “Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it?” They also asked, “What are the names of those who are constructing this building?” But the eye of their God was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.

This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates, the officials of Trans-Euphrates, sent to King Darius. The report they sent him read as follows:

To King Darius:

Cordial greetings.

The king should know that we went to the district of Judah, to the temple of the great God. The people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls. The work is being carried on with diligence and is making rapid progress under their direction.

We questioned the elders and asked them, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and to finish it?" We also asked them their names, so that we could write down the names of their leaders for your information.

This is the answer they gave us:

"We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the temple that was built many years ago, one that a great king of Israel built and finished. But because our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean, king of Babylon, who destroyed this temple and deported the people to Babylon.

"However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this house of God. He even removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon. Then King Cyrus gave them to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor, and he told him, 'Take these articles and go and deposit them in the temple in Jerusalem. And rebuild the house of God on its site.'

"So this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem. From that day to the present it has been under construction but is not yet finished."

Now if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if King Cyrus did in fact issue a decree to rebuild

this house of God in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us his decision in this matter.

King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury at Babylon. A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it:

Memorandum:

In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem:

Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be sixty cubits¹ high and sixty cubits wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God.

Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and you other officials of that province, stay away from there. Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this house of God on its site.

Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of this house of God:

Their expenses are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop. Whatever is needed — young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine and olive oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem — must be given them daily without fail, so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

Furthermore, I decree that if anyone defies this edict, a beam is to be pulled from their house and they are to be impaled on it. And for this crime their house is to be made a pile of rubble. May God, who has caused his Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lifts a hand to change this decree or to destroy this temple in

Jerusalem.

I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.

Then, because of the decree King Darius had sent, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence. So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the temple according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

So on March 12, 516 BC, almost 70 years after its destruction, the rebuilding of the temple was complete. Sustained work had continued on the project for three and a half years. Though not as large or spectacular as Solomon's temple, the rebuilt temple actually enjoyed a longer life.

Then the people of Israel — the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles — celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy. For the dedication of this house of God they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and, as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel. And they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of God at Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.

Many Jews chose not to return to Judah. One man, Mordecai, was living in the city of Susa — one of the four capitals of the Persian Empire — with his adopted daughter Hadassah, also known as Esther. Through a series of miraculous events, they both become involved in a web of circumstances that involved the king, a royal decree and a heinous plot of betrayal.

1Sixty cubits: That is, about 90 feet or 27 meters.

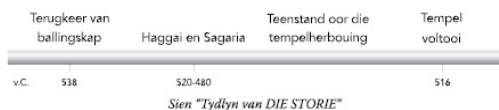
Die terugkeer huis toe

In die eerste jaar wat Kores koning van Persië was, het die HERE die belofte wat Jeremia gebring het, vervul. Die HERE het gesorg dat Kores koning van Persië 'n besluit neem, dit neerskryf en deur sy hele ryk sirkuleer. Die besluit was soos volg:

“So sê Kores koning van Persië:

“Die HERE, die God van die hemel, het my beheer oor al die koninkryke van die aarde gegee. Hy het my aangestel om vir Hom 'n tempel in Jerusalem in Juda te bou. As julle deel is van sy volk, mag julle teruggaan na Jerusalem in Juda om hierdie tempel van die HERE, die God van Israel, die God wat in Jerusalem is, te gaan herbou. Mag God by julle wees! Van die mense van Juda wat nog in ander gebiede oorbly, se bure moet hulle deel bydra om te help dra aan die uitgawes van dié wat wil teruggaan. Hulle moet silwer en goud, voorraad vir die terugtog en vee voorsien, asook vrywillige offers vir die tempel vir God in Jerusalem.”

God het toe die gesindheid van die priesters en die Leviëte, en ook van die stamleiers van Juda en Benjamin beïnvloed om na Jerusalem toe terug te gaan om die tempel van die HERE te herbou. Al hulle bure het hulle bygestaan deur vir hulle voorwerpe van silwer en goud te gee. Hulle het ook voorraad en vee vir die terugtog voorsien. Bo en behalwe alles wat hulle vrywillig aan hulle gegee het, het hulle ook waardevolle geskenke saamgegee.



Koning Kores het self ook waardevolle voorwerpe gegee. Dit was die voorwerpe wat Nebukadnesar voorheen uit die tempel van die HERE in Jerusalem gevat het en in die tempel van sy eie gode gesit het.

In totaal is daar 5 400 voorwerpe van goud en silwer aan Sesbassar

gegee om na Jerusalem toe terug te vat wanneer die ballinge uit Babel daarheen sou terugkeer.

’n Totaal van 42 360 mense het na Juda toe teruggekeer. Daarby moet nog 7 337 slawe en slavinne en 200 manlike en vroulike sangers getel word. Hulle het 736 perde en 245 muile saamgebring, asook 435 kamele en 6 720 donkies.

Die Babiloniërs het vir Serubbabel, kleinseun van Jojakim – Juda se voorlaaste koning – as goewerneur oor Juda aangestel. Dit het hom die laaste in Dawid se nageslag gemaak wat met politieke outoriteit vertrou is. In 537 v.C. het Serubbabel hierdie ongeveer 50 000 mense teruggelei huis toe waar hulle met hulle herbouingstaak begin het. Met die lang en harde werk wat voorgelê het, het die mense onthou om die belangrikste dinge eerste te stel. Met moed en oortuiging het hulle eerste die altaar herbou, en toe die fondasie van die huis van God. Ware aanbidding was weer ’n realiteit.

Die Israeliete het hulle in hulle stede gaan vestig. Vroegherfs het die hele volk in Jerusalem bymekaargekom. Jesua seun van Josadak en sy medepriesters, asook Serubbabel seun van Sealtiel en sy familie het toe die altaar van die God van Israel begin herbou. Hulle wou offers daarop bring soos die wet van Moses, die man van God, voorgeskryf het. Hoewel hulle bang was vir die plaaslike inwoners, het hulle die altaar weer op sy oorspronklike plek herbou. Hulle het dadelik vir die HERE brandoffers op die altaar begin offer. Hulle het dit elke oggend en aand gedoen. Hulle het ook die Huttefees gevier soos die wet van Moses voorgeskryf het. Elke dag van die fees het hulle die voorgeskrewe offer vir die dag gebring. Ná die fees het hulle voortgegaan om die gereelde brandoffers te bring. Hulle het ook die offers gebring wat met die Nuwemaanfees en ook die ander feeste van die HERE saamgaan. Die mense het ook weer vrywillige offers vir die HERE gebring.

Die dag toe die bouers die fondasie van die HERE se tempel gelê het, het die priesters, geklee in hulle seremoniële drag, hulle plekke ingeneem en op hulle trompette geblaas. Die Leviete en die Asafgroep het lof aan die HERE gebring deur simbale te slaan soos koning Dawid van Israel voorgeskryf het. Hulle het die HERE geloof en gedank deur te sing:

“Hy is goed!

Sy troue liefde vir Israel sal nooit ophou nie!”

Al die mense het daarna hard uitgeroep terwyl hulle die HERE geloof het omdat die fondasie van die HERE se tempel gelê is. Baie van die ouer priesters, Leviëte en van die ander leiers het onthou hoe die eerste tempel gelyk het. Toe hulle die fondasie van die nuwe tempel sien, het hulle hardop begin huil. Van die ander het op hulle beurt weer geskreu van blydschap. Die geskreu en gehuil kon nie onderskei word nie, maar het saam ’n oorverdowende lawaai veroorsaak. Dit kon baie ver gehoor word.

Die vyande van Juda en Benjamin het gehoor dat die ballinge besig was om die tempel van die HERE, die God van Israel, te herbou. Hulle het toe vir Serubbabel en die ander leiers genader en gesê: “Ons wil saamwerk, want ons aanbid dieselfde God as julle. Ons het al van die tyd af toe koning Esarhaddon van Assirië ons hierheen gebring het, aan Hom offers gebring.”

Maar Serubbabel, Jesua en die ander leiers van Israel het geantwoord: “Ons het niks in gemeen met julle nie, julle mag nie deel wees van hierdie projek nie. Koning Kores het ons beveel om die tempel vir die HERE, die God van Israel, te bou, en ons sal dit doen.”

Die plaaslike bevolking het toe die mense van Juda uit die werk probeer hou deur hulle moed te breek en hulle bang te maak. Hulle het mense omgekoop om hulle te frustreer en hulle planne in die wiele te ry. Tydens die bewind van Kores van Persië het hulle aangehou om so op te tree totdat koning Darius van Persië aan bewind gekom het.

Die werk aan die tempel van God in Jerusalem is toe gestop. Alles het net so bly lê tot in die tweede jaar van koning Darius van Persië se regering.

Die teruggekeerde bannelinge se aanvanklike sukses het die Samaritane en ander bure, wat gevrees het wat die herbou van die tempel in ’n florerende Joodse staat vir die politieke stabiliteit van die omgewing kan beteken, bekommer. Hulle het die proses dus sterk teengestaan en die werk vir ongeveer ses jaar onderbreek en toe vir nog tien jaar heeltemal gestop. Versigtig vir die teenstand en gevegte het die Israëliete begin dink dat dit tog nie die regte tyd is om God se huis te herbou nie. In plaas daarvan het hulle op hulle eie huise gekonsentreer. Maar God het ander planne gehad. Hy het weer ingegryp en sy profete gestuur om die tempelprojek weer aan die gang

te kry. Haggai se boodskap het gehelp om die mense uit hulle selfvoldaanheid te skud.

Op 29 Augustus, in die tweede jaar wat Darius koning was, het die HERE die profeet Haggai gebruik om 'n boodskap aan Serubbabel en Jesua oor te dra. Serubbabel, die seun van Sealtiel, was goewerneur van Juda, en Jesua, die seun van Josadak, was die hoëpriester.

Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Die mense sê: ‘Die tyd het nog nie aangebreek om die huis van die HERE, die tempel, te herbou nie.’”

Die HERE het toe deur die profeet Haggai die volgende boodskap gestuur: “Hoe kan julle in weelderige huise bly terwyl my huis 'n ruïne is? Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: Dink 'n bietjie na oor hoe sake vir julle staan! Julle het baie aanplantings gedoen, maar die oes was maar skraal. Julle het nou wel kos om te eet, maar julle is nog honger. Julle het wyn om te drink, maar nie genoeg om julle dors te les nie. Julle het klere om aan te trek, maar dit is nie voldoende om julle warm te hou nie. Julle geld raak weg asof dit gebêre is in 'n broeksak met gate!

“Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: Dink 'n bietjie na oor hoe sake vir julle staan! Gaan haal hout op die heuwels en begin dan my huis herstel. Dit sal My tevrede stel en Ek sal voel dat julle My eer betoon, sê die HERE. Julle het gehoop dat dit 'n goeie oes sal wees, maar dit was maar skraal. Die oes wat julle nog huis toe gebring het, het Ek weggewaai. Waarom? Omdat julle almal besig is om julle eie netjiese huise te bou en dit terwyl my huis in puin lê, sê die HERE, die Almagtige. Dit is die rede hoekom daar nie dou uit die hemel kom nie en die aarde nie graan oplewer nie. Ek is verantwoordelik vir die droogte oor die weivelde en die heuwels. Dit is 'n droogte wat die graan, die druiwe, die olywe en al die ander graangewasse beskadig; 'n droogte wat julle en julle vee sal laat honger lei; 'n droogte wat alles waaraan julle so hard gewerk het, tot niet sal laat gaan.”

Die profeet Haggai het die boodskap van die HERE aan die mense oorgedra. Serubbabel, Jesua en al die mense wat in die land agtergebly het, het die boodskap van die HERE hulle God gehoorsaam. Hulle het toe in alle erns die HERE begin aanbid.

Die HERE se boodskapper Haggai het toe hierdie boodskap van die HERE vir die mense gebring: “Ek is by julle, sê die HERE!” Hierdeur het die HERE die goewerneur Serubbabel en die hoëpriester Jesua, asook al die HERE se mense wat in die land agtergebly het, baie entoesiasies gemaak. Hulle het na die huis van die HERE, die Almagtige, hulle God gekom en daaraan begin werk. Dit was op 21 September, die tweede

jaar wat Darius koning was.

Haggai het voortgegaan om sy profetiese boodskap van bemoediging te bring. God het nie van sy verbond met Abraham, Isak en Jakob vergeet nie, het hy gesê. En hy het gewys op 'n glorieryke toekomsbelofte wat te goed geklink het om waar te wees – 'n belofte wat uiteindelik vervul sou word toe Jesus die Messias die tempel besoek het.

Op 17 Oktober van dieselfde jaar het die HERE weer vir die profeet Haggai 'n boodskap gegee. “Sê vir Serubbabel, die seun van Sealtiel, goewerneur van Juda, en Jesua, die seun van Josadak, die hoëpriester, asook vir al die HERE se mense wat in die land oorgebly het, die volgende: Is daar nog enigiemand wat kan onthou hoe hierdie huis, die tempel, vroeër gelyk het? Hoe vergelyk die tempel nou met daardie een van vroeër? Daar is geen vergelyking nie, nie waar nie! Maar skep moed, Serubbabel, skep moed, Jesua, seun van Josadak, die hoëpriester, sê die HERE. Ook al die mense wat nog in die land oor is, moet moed skep, sê die HERE. Skep moed en doen die werk, want Ek is by julle, sê die HERE, die Almagtige. My Gees sal by julle bly soos Ek julle belowe het toe julle uit Egipte getrek het. Julle moet glad nie bang wees nie.”

Dit is wat die oppermagtige HERE sê: “Binnekort gaan Ek die hemel en die aarde weer skud. Ek gaan die oseane en die droë grond skud. Al die volke gaan Ek ook skud. Al hierdie nasies se skatte sal na hierdie tempel toe gebring word. Ek sal hierdie plek met heerlijkheid vul, sê die HERE, die Almagtige. Die silwer en die goud behoort aan My, sê die HERE, die Almagtige. Die toekomstige roem van hierdie tempel sal baie groter wees as wat dit in die verlede was, sê die HERE, die Almagtige. Ek sal in hierdie plek vrede bewerkstellig. Ek, die HERE, die Almagtige, bevestig dit!”

Sagaria, 'n profeet en priester, het sy werk in Jerusalem in 520 v.C. begin, tydens Haggai se bedieningstyd. Beide mans wou nuwe ywer in die tempelbou-projek blaas. Soos Haggai, het Sagaria ook 'n dubbele boodskap gehad: Die tempel is belangrik, maar dit is 'n teken en simbool van iets baie groter wat gaan kom. Werk aan die tempel; moenie bang wees nie. Maar wees op die uitkyk vir die dag wanneer God Jerusalem weer sal seën.

Gedurende die middel van herfs, in die tweede jaar van koning

Darius se regering, het die HERE hierdie boodskap aan die profeet Sagaria, die seun van Berekja, die kleinseun van Iddo, gegee.

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “My liefde vir Sion is baie sterk. Ek is passievol oor Jerusalem.”

So sê die HERE: “Ek keer terug na Sion, Ek gaan in Jerusalem woon. Jerusalem sal genoem word Stad van Trou, die berg van die HERE, die Almagtige, sal genoem word Heilige Berg.”

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Ou mans en vroue sal weer op die pleine van Jerusalem sit, elkeen met ’n kerie omdat hulle so oud is. Die strate van die stad sal weer vol seuns en dogters wees wat daar speel.”

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Al hierdie dinge lyk dalk vandag vir julle, ’n klein en mismoedige oorblyfsel van God se volk, onmoontlik. Maar dink julle dit is onmoontlik vir My, die HERE, die Almagtige?”

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Julle kan daarvan seker wees dat Ek my volk gaan red van die nasies in die ooste en die weste. Ek gaan hulle weer tuis laat kom en veilig in Jerusalem laat woon. Hulle sal my volk wees en Ek sal in trou en regverdigheid hulle God wees.”

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Wees sterk! Julle het gehoor wat die profete destyds oor die bou van die tempel van die HERE, die Almagtige, gesê het, die dag dat die fondamente gelê is. Voor die werk aan die tempel begin het, was daar nie werk nie en ook nie lone nie, nie vir mense nie en ook nie vir diere nie. Geen reisiger was veilig teen vyande nie omdat daar van alle kante vyande was. Ek het al die mense teen mekaar laat draai. Nou sal Ek die oorblyfsel van my volk nie behandel soos wat Ek hulle vroeër behandel het nie,” sê die HERE, die Almagtige.

“Ek saai die saad van vrede en voorspoed onder julle. Die wingerde sal swaar dra aan druiwe. Die aarde sal sy opbrengs lewer en die hemel sal dou lewer. Ek sal weer ’n keer die oorblyfsel van Juda en Israel die erfgename van hierdie seëninge maak. Juda en Israel het onder die nasies simbole geword van wat dit beteken om vervloek te wees. Maar nie langer nie! Nou sal Ek julle red en julle ’n simbool en ’n bron van seën maak. Moenie bang of mismoedig wees nie. Wees sterk!”

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Ek het nie van plan verander toe julle voorouers My kwaad gemaak en Ek besluit het om hulle te straf nie,” sê die HERE, die Almagtige. “Net so sal Ek ook nie my

besluit om Jerusalem en die volk van Juda te seën, verander nie. Moenie bang wees nie! Dit is wat julle moet doen: Praat die waarheid met mekaar. Maak seker dat die regspraak in julle howe regverdig is en tot vrede lei. Moenie bose planne maak om mekaar kwaad aan te doen nie. Hou op om vals te sweer. Ek haat al hierdie soort dinge,” sê die HERE.

Hier is nog 'n boodskap van die HERE, die Almagtige, wat tot my gekom het.

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Die tradisionele tye van vas en rou wat julle vroeg somer, in die middel van die somer, in herfs en winter gehou het, kom nou tot 'n einde. Dit word nou feeste van vrolikheid en vreugde vir die volk van Juda. Julle moet waarheid en vrede liefhê.”

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Mense van ander nasies en stede van die wêreld sal na Jerusalem toe kom. Mense van een stad sal aan die mense van 'n ander stad sê: ‘Kom ons gaan na Jerusalem toe en vra daar vir die HERE om ons te seën en om die HERE, die Almagtige, te soek. Ek gaan om dit te doen!’ Mense van baie nasies, selfs groot nasies, sal Jerusalem toe kom om die HERE, die Almagtige, te soek en om te vra dat die HERE hulle sal seën.”

Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “In daardie tyd sal tien mense uit al die nasies en tale van die wêreld een Judeër aan sy kleed gryp en sê: ‘Ons wil saam met julle gaan, want ons het gehoor God is by julle.’”

Danksy Haggai en Sagaria se bemoediging het die mense weer begin met hulle werk aan die tempel. Hulle was egter nie die enigstes weer aan die werk nie. Ook hulle opposisie, hierdie keer van Tettanai, die goewerneur van die Trans-Eufraatiese streek was weer aan die werk. Maar die mense kon nie voorsien wat God volgende sou doen nie.

Die goewerneur Tattenai van die provinsie wes van die Eufraat, Setar-Bosnai en hulle amptenare het toe na Jerusalem toe gegaan en gevra: “Wie het vir julle toestemming gegee om hierdie tempel te herbou en die gebou klaar te maak?” Hulle het ook 'n lys gevra van die name van al die mense wat aan die tempel gewerk het. Maar omdat hulle God vir hulle gesorg het, het die leiers van die Judeërs met die bouwerk voortgegaan. Dit sou so aangaan totdat Darius 'n antwoord sou gee op die verslag wat aan hom gestuur is.

Hierdie is 'n afskrif van die brief wat die goewerneur Tattenai, Setar-Bosnai en die ander amptenare van die provinsie wes van die

Eufraat vir koning Darius gestuur het. In die verslag wat hulle aan hom gestuur het, het die volgende gestaan:

“Ons groet koning Darius.

“Hiermee wil ons aan u bekendmaak dat ons na die bouterrein van die tempel van die groot God in die provinsie Juda gegaan het. Die bouwerk word met spesiaal voorbereide stene gedoen en balke word ook in die mure ingebou. Die werk word met groot ywer gedoen en hulle maak goeie vordering.

“Ons het die leiers gevra: ‘Wie het vir julle toestemming gegee om hierdie tempel te herbou en hierdie gebou te herstel?’ Ons het ook hulle name gevra sodat ons u kon inlig wie die leiers is.

“Hulle het soos volg geantwoord:

“Ons is die dienaars van die God van die hemel en die aarde. Ons herbou die tempel wat baie lank gelede hier deur ’n beroemde koning van Israel klaar gebou is. Ons voorouers het egter die God van die hemel kwaad gemaak. Daarom het Hy hulle toe aan die mag van die Galdeër koning Nebukadnesar van Babel oorgelewer. Nebukadnesar het hierdie tempel vernietig en die mense na Babilonië in ballingskap weggevoer.

“Maar koning Kores van Babel het gedurende sy eerste regeringsjaar ’n dekreet uitgevaardig dat hierdie tempel van God herbou moet word. Koning Nebukadnesar het goue en silwer voorwerpe uit die tempel van God in Jerusalem verwyder en in die tempel in Babel gesit. Maar koning Kores het dit weer teruggesit in die tempel in Jerusalem. Hy het die voorwerpe aan Sesbassar, wat hy as goewerneur van Juda aangestel het, vir veilige bewaring gegee. Die koning het hom beveel om hierdie gebruiksvoorwerpe op hulle plek in die tempel in Jerusalem terug te sit. Hy moes ook die tempel van God weer herbou op die plek waar dit oorspronklik was.

“Hierdie Sesbassar het gekom en die fondasie van die tempel van God in Jerusalem kom lê. Sedertdien het die mense daaraan kom werk, maar dit is nog nie voltooi nie.’

“As dit vir u goed is, o Koning, soek dan in die koningsargiewe van Babel of koning Kores wel ’n dekreet uitgevaardig het dat hierdie tempel van God in Jerusalem herbou moet word. Laat ons dan asseblief weet, o Koning, wat u beslissing hieroor is.”

Koning Darius het toe opdrag gegee dat ’n ondersoek in die argiewe

in Babel gedoen moes word. Die dokumente is daar gehou. Die boekrol is egter in Agmeta, 'n vestingstad in die provinsie Medië, gevind. Dit het só gelees:

“In die eerste jaar van koning Kores se regering is 'n dekreet uitgevaardig oor die tempel van God in Jerusalem.

“Hulle moet die tempel op dieselfde fondasie herbou as 'n plek waar hulle altyd die offers kan bring. Die gebou moet 30 meter hoog en 30 meter breed wees. Op elke drie lae van die gekapte steenblokke moet hulle 'n laag hout plaas. Die koninklike skatkis sal alle kostes vir die bouwerk dra. Al die goue en silwer voorwerpe wat Nebukadnesar uit die tempel van God in Jerusalem gevat het en na Babel toe gebring is, moet teruggegee word. Dit sal soos vroeër weer in die tempel van God in Jerusalem gesit word.”

“Aan die goewerneur Tattenai van die provinsie wes van die Eufraatrivier, Setar-Bosnai en die ander amptenare van die provinsie wes van die Eufraat: Bly weg daarvandaan! Moenie in die pad staan van die bouwerk aan die tempel van God nie. Laat die goewerneur van Juda en die Judese leiers toe om die tempel van God op die oorspronklike plek te herbou.

“Ek beveel verder ook dat julle hierdie leiers van die Jode moet bystaan om die tempel van God te herbou. Betaal ook dadelik al die kostes van die bouwerk uit die belasting wat julle in julle provinsie wes van die Eufraat ingesamel het sodat die werk nie stilstaan nie. Voorsien ook aan die priesters in Jerusalem wat hulle nodig het om aan die God van die hemel te offer. Dit sluit in jong bulle, ramme en lammers. Moet ook nie nalaat om vir hulle die koring, sout, wyn en olyfolie te gee wat hulle daagliks nodig het nie. Hulle sal dan in staat wees om aanvaarbare offers aan die God van die hemel te bring en vir my en my seuns te bid.

“Ek beveel ook dat as mense hierdie bevel verontagsaam, 'n balk uit hulle huise geruk moet word. Nadat hulle aan die balk opgehang en geslaan is, sal hulle huise 'n rommelhoop gemaak word. God het Jerusalem gekies as 'n plek waar hulle sy Naam sal eer. Mag Hy enige koning of nasie wat my bevel verontagsaam en die tempel afbreek, vernietig.

“Ek, Darius, het hierdie dekreet uitgevaardig. Mense moet dit met sorg nakom.”

Tattenai die goewerneur van die provinsie wes van die Eufraatrivier, Setar-Bosnai en die ander amptenare het die bevel van koning Darius sorgvuldig nagekom. Die prediking van die profete Haggai en Sagaria seun van Iddo het die Joodse leiers aangespoor om met die werk aan te gaan. Soos die God van Israel beveel het en op bevel van Kores, Darius en Artasasta, die konings van Persië, het hulle die tempel uiteindelik klaar gebou. Die werk aan die tempel was klaar op 12 Maart. Dit was in die sesde jaar wat koning Darius regeer het.

Op 12 Maart 516 v.C., amper 70 jaar na die verwoesting daarvan, is die tempel klaar herbou. Die werk het drie en 'n half jaar geduur. Alhoewel dit nie so groot en fantasties soos Salomo se tempel was nie, het die herboude tempel langer gestaan.

Die mense van Israel, die priesters, die Leviëte en al die mense wat uit ballingskap teruggekom het, het die tempel van God met groot blydschap ingewy. By die inwyding van die tempel van God is 100 jong bulle, 200 skaapramme en 400 lammers geoffer. Hulle het ook twaalf bokramme as 'n sonde-offer vir die twaalf stamme van Israel geoffer. Hulle het die priesters en die Leviëte in verskillende groepe ingedeel om God in Jerusalem te dien net soos dit in Moses se boek voorgeskryf is.

Baie Jode het verkies om nie terug te keer na Juda nie. Een man, Mordegai, het in die dorp Susan – een van die vier hoofstede van die Persiese ryk – gebly saam met sy aangenome dogter, Hadassa, ook bekend as Ester. Deur 'n reeks wonderbaarlike gebeure het hulle albei betrokke geraak in 'n web omstandighede wat die koning, 'n koninklike dekreet en 'n afskuwelike komplot van verraad behels.

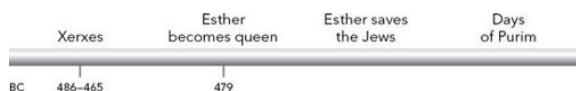
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The Queen of Beauty and Courage

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: At that

time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.

For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa. The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.



Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him — Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas — to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times and were closest to the king — Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memukan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.

“According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?” he asked.

“She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her.”

Then Memukan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, “Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen’s conduct will respond to all the king’s nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

“Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. Then when the king’s edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.”

The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memukan proposed. He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue.

Later when King Xerxes’ fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. Then the king’s personal attendants proposed, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.” This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

Vashti paid the price for her stand against the king. Although she was the rightful queen, she was deposed at the whim of her husband.

Such was the precarious state of women—and men — in the royal court.

Women outside the court were also subject to the king's plans. His decree that girls from the kingdom be brought into his harem was irrefutable. The girls and their families had no say in the matter. If the king summoned, the family had no choice but to surrender their daughter to the king.

Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. Mordecai had a cousin named Hadas-sah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.

Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

Before a young woman's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to

the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.

When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Big-thana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

Haman, a noble in the king's court, was not aware of Esther's background and Mordecai's loyalty to the king or he may not have plotted so openly against the Jews. However, Jewish tradition considers him to have been a descendant of the Ama-lekite king Agag, an enemy of Israel during Saul's reign. The Amalekites were ancient enemies of the Jews. So perhaps his confrontation with Mordecai and resulting decree against the Jews was inevitable.

After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of

Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the *pur* (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury."

So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and

sealed with his own ring. Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews — young and old, women and children — on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.

The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless

the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”

When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as

this?”

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.

Queen Vashti had earlier risked her life by refusing to appear before the king when summoned. As a result she lost her standing as queen. Now Esther risks her life by appearing before the same king uninvited.

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king’s hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

Then the king asked, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.”

“If it pleases the king,” replied Esther, “let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.”

“Bring Haman at once,” the king said, “so that we may do what Esther asks.”

So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared.

As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, “Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.”

Esther replied, “My petition and my request is this: If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king’s question.”

Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home.

Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. “And that’s not all,” Haman added. “I’m the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.”

His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits,¹ and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself.” This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.

That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

“What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?” the king asked.

“Nothing has been done for him,” his attendants answered.

The king said, “Who is in the court?” Now Haman had just entered

the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about impaling Mordecai on the pole he had set up for him.

His attendants answered, “Haman is standing in the court.”

“Bring him in,” the king ordered.

When Haman entered, the king asked him, “What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?”

Now Haman thought to himself, “Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?” So he answered the king, “For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king’s most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, ‘This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!’”

“Go at once,” the king commanded Haman. “Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended.”

So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!”

Afterward Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him.

His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, “Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him — you will surely come to ruin!” While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther’s banquet, and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, “Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.”

Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life — this is my petition. And spare my people — this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.”

King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is he — the man who has dared to do such a thing?”

Esther said, “An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!”

Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.

The king exclaimed, “Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?”

As soon as the word left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, “A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman’s house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.”

The king said, “Impale him on it!” So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided.

That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman’s estate.

Esther and Mordecai are secure, but the irrevocable decree is still a threat to the rest of the Jews. Haman’s overthrow and Mordecai’s elevation could not give Esther comfort so long as Haman’s decree against the Jews remained in force.

Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.

“If it pleases the king,” she said, “and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king’s provinces. For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?”

King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up. Now write another decree in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king’s signet ring — for no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.”

At once the royal secretaries were summoned — on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai’s orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king’s signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king.

The king’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies. The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

The couriers, riding the royal horses, went out, spurred on by the

king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa.

When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful.

The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted."

"If it pleases the king," Esther answered, "give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let

Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles."

So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they impaled the ten sons of Haman. The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

This story of Esther and Mordecai is also the story of the beginnings of one of the annual Jewish festivals, the festival of Purim. The story also keeps the memory alive of the great deliverance of the Jewish people during the reign of Xerxes.

Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the *pur* (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction. But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be impaled on poles. (Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word *pur*.) Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, the Jews took it on themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should

without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never fail to be celebrated by the Jews — nor should the memory of these days die out among their descendants.

1Fifty cubits: That is, about 75 feet or about 22.5 meters.

'n Koningin met skoonheid en moed

Hierdie dinge het gebeur in die tyd van Ahasveros, wat koning was oor 127 provinsies wat gestrek het van Indië af tot by Etiopië. Die setel van sy regering was in daardie tyd in die vestingstad Susan. In die derde jaar van sy regering het hy 'n onthaal gegee vir al sy hoë amptenare en die ander vooraanstaande persone in sy diens. Die leëroffisiere van Persië en Medië, die vername mense en die goewerneurs van die provinsies was daar.

Die fees het 180 dae lank aangehou, terwyl die koning gespog het met die rykdom van sy koninkryk en al die prag en praal daarvan. Na afloop hiervan het die koning almal wat in die vestingstad Susan gebly het, van die belangrikste tot die minste, 'n week lank in die tuin van sy paleis onthaal. Die tuin was versier met wit en bloedrooi gordyne wat met pers linnetoue vas was aan silwerringe aan die marmerpilare. Daar was goue en silwerrusbanke op die plaveisel wat uitgelê was met vier soorte edelstene. Drank is bedien in goue bekere met verskillende ontwerpe. Daar was 'n oorvloed wyn wat die koning voorsien het. Die koning se opdrag was dat elkeen sonder beperking kon drink. Hy het sy paleispersoneel beveel om elkeen se wense te eerbiedig.



Koningin Vasti het terselfdertyd ook die vroue in Ahasveros se paleis onthaal.

Teen die sewende dag was die koning al goed vrolik van die wyn. Hy het sy sewe persoonlike paleisbeamptes nadergeroep. Hulle was Mehuman, Bisseta, Garbona, Bigta, Abagta, Setar en Karkas. Hy het hulle aangesê om koningin Vasti met haar koninklike kroon op haar kop na hom toe te laat kom. Hy wou hê al die mense en die hoë amptenare moes sien hoe mooi sy is. Sy was beeldskoon. Toe koningin Vasti by die amptenare hoor wat die koning sê, het sy geweier om te kom. Die koning het baie kwaad geword. Hy het gekook van woede.

Hy het met sy verstandige raadgewers gepraat. Hulle het die gebruike en gewoontes, die wet en die reg geken. Die koning het hulle altyd geraadpleeg. Karsena, Setar, Admata, Tarsis, Meres, Marsena en Memukan was die koning se vertrouelinge. Die sewe mans was hoofamptenare van Persië en Medië wat direkte toegang tot die koning gehad het. Hulle het die hoogste poste in die koninkryk beklee.

“Volgens die wet, hoe moet met Vasti handel word?” vra hy hulle. “Sy wou nie gehoorsaam wees aan die opdrag wat koning Ahasveros amptelik deur sy paleisbeamptes aan haar gegee het nie.”

Memukan sê toe vir die koning en sy hoë amptenare: “Dit is nie net teen die koning alleen wat koningin Vasti oortree het nie, maar tegelykertyd ook teen al die hoë amptenare en al die volke in al die provinsies van die koning. Sodra haar optrede onder die vroue bekend word, sal hulle oral hulle mans begin minag. Hulle sal sê: ‘Koning Ahasveros het beveel dat koningin Vasti voor hom moet verskyn, maar sy het geweier om te kom.’ Die vroue van die hoë amptenare van Persië en Medië sal vandag nog te hore kom wat die koningin gedoen het. Dit gaan vir hulle rede gee om hulle mans ook met minagting te behandel.

“As dit reg is vir die koning, vaardig dan ’n skriftelike bevel van Persië en Medië uit wat nooit verander mag word nie, dat Vasti nooit weer voor koning Ahasveros mag kom nie. Die koning sal vir hom ’n ander koningin kry wat dit meer werd is as sy. Sodra die bevel wat die koning uitgevaardig het oor sy uitgestrekte koninkryk bekend word, sal elke vrou haar man, belangrik of onbelangrik, met die nodige eerbied behandel.”

Dit het vir die koning en sy hoë amptenare reg gelyk. Die koning het toe gemaak soos Memukan voorgestel het. Hy het na elke provinsie briewe gestuur in hulle eie skrif en in die taal van die mense wat daar bly. Hy het bevel gegee dat elke man baas moet wees in sy eie huis en kan sê wat hy wil.

Toe koning Ahasveros se woede hierna tot bedaring kom, het hy Vasti begin mis. Hy het onthou wat sy alles gedoen het. Hy het nagedink oor wat hy oor haar besluit het. Die amptenare wat in sy persoonlike diens was, sê toe vir hom: “Laat ons na mooi meisies vir die koning soek. Hy moet agente aanstel om in al die provinsies van sy koninkryk mooi meisies te werf vir die koning se harem in die vestingstad Susan. Hegai, die hoof-haremopsigter, moet dan toesien dat hulle skoonheidsbehandeling ontvang. Die meisie wat vir die koning die mooiste is, moet in Vasti se plek koningin gemaak word.”

Die koning het van hierdie idee gehou. Hy het toe so gemaak.

Vasti het die prys betaal omdat sy teen die koning opgestaan het. Alhoewel sy die regmatige koningin was, het haar man vinnig van haar ontslae geraak. Dit was die twyfelagtige posisie van vroue – en mans – aan die koninklike hof.

Vroue buite die hof was ook onderworpe aan die koning se planne. Sy dekreet dat meisies in die koninkryk na sy harem gebring moes word, was onweerspreeklik. Die meisies en hulle gesinne het geen sê in die saak gehad nie. As die koning 'n meisie laat kom, het die gesin geen keuse gehad as om hulle dogter aan die koning te gee nie.

In die vestingstad Susan was daar 'n Jood met die naam Mordegai. Hy was uit die stam Benjamin en was 'n seun van Jaïr, die seun van Simi, die seun van Kis. Sy familie was tussen die ballinge wat koning Nebukadnesar van Babel saam met koning Jojagin van Juda uit Jerusalem weggevoer het. Mordegai het sy niggie Hadassa grootgemaak. Haar ander naam was Ester. Sy was 'n weeskind. Nadat haar pa en ma dood is, het Mordegai haar as sy dogter aangeneem. Sy was buitengewoon mooi.

Nadat die koning se besluit bekendgemaak is, is Ester ook saam met baie ander meisies onder Hegai se sorg in die stad Susan in die koning se paleis geplaas. Hegai was baie in sy skik met Ester en hy het haar baie goed behandel. Hy het gesorg dat sy goeie skoonheidsbehandeling kry en die regte dieet volg. Hy het sewe van die beste kamerpersoneel tot haar beskikking gestel en hulle na die beste deel van die koning se harem verskuif.

Ester het vir niemand gesê van watter volk sy kom, of wie haar familie is nie. Mordegai het haar verbied om dit te doen. Mordegai het elke dag in die voorhof van die harem gaan rondstaan om agter te kom hoe dit met Ester gaan en wat met haar gebeur.

Voordat dit 'n meisie se beurt was om na die koning te kom, moes sy volgens voorskrif eers twaalf maande lank skoonheidsbehandeling kry. Sy is ses maande lank met mirre-olie behandel en ses maande lank met lekkerruikkruid en ander skoonheidsmiddels. Daarna kon sy voor koning Ahasveros gaan verskyn. Elke meisie kon, wanneer dit haar beurt was om voor die koning in sy paleis te verskyn, uit die harem kies wat sy wou aantrek. Elke meisie is in die aand na die koning se paleis toe geneem en die volgende oggend teruggeneem na 'n ander deel van die koning se harem. Dit was onder die sorg van Saäsgas, die haremopsigter oor die byvroue. Sy kon nooit weer na die

koning toe teruggaan nie, behalwe as hy baie van haar gehou het en spesifiek vir haar gevra het.

Toe kom Ester se beurt, die dogter van Abigajil, die oom van Mordegai wat haar as sy eie dogter aangeneem het. Sy het vir niks meer gevra as wat Hegai, die hoof van die koning se harem, vir haar aanbeveel het nie. Almal wat haar gesien het, was opgewonde oor haar. Ester is na koning Ahasveros se koninklike paleis gevat in die tiende maand, die maand Tebet, in die sewende regeringsjaar van die koning.

Die koning het Ester meer liefgehad as enige van die ander jong meisies. Sy was meer na sy sin as enigeen van die ander. Hy het toe die koningin se kroon op haar kop gesit en haar koningin gemaak in die plek van Vasti. Ter ere van Ester het die koning 'n groot onthaal gereël vir al sy hoë amptenare en almal wat in sy diens was. Hy het daarvan 'n vakansiedag in al die provinsies gemaak. Hy het rojal geskenke vir almal uitgedeel.

In die tyd toe die jong meisies na die tweede harem oorgeplaas is, is Mordegai as amptenaar van die koning aangestel. Ester het nog steeds stilgebly oor haar familie en haar volk. Sy het nog steeds gedoen wat Mordegai vir haar sê, soos toe sy nog 'n kind by hom in die huis was.

In die tyd dat Mordegai aan diens was in die poort van die paleis, het die twee haremamptenare Bigtana en Teres, wat diens as deurwagte gedoen het, kwaad geword vir die koning. Hulle het saamgesweer om koning Ahasveros te vermoor. Mordegai het daarvan gehoor en vir koningin Ester daarvan laat weet. Ester het dit toe namens Mordegai aan die koning gaan oortel. Toe die gerug ondersoek word, is gevind dat dit waar is. Die twee mans is toe opgehang. Die gebeurtenis is voor die koning in die geskiedenisboek van sy regering opgeteken.

Haman, 'n edelman aan die koning se hof, was nie bewus van Ester se agtergrond en Mordegai se loyaliteit aan die koning nie, anders sou hy dalk nie so openlik teen die Jode gewees het nie. Joodse tradisie beskou hom egter as 'n nasaat van die Amalekitiese koning Agag, 'n vyand van Israel gedurende Saul se bewind. Die Amalekiete was antieke vyande van die Jode. Dalk was sy konfrontasie met Mordegai en die daaropvolgende proklamasie teen die Jode dus onafwendbaar.

'n Ruk na hierdie dinge gebeur het, het koning Ahasveros vir Haman, seun van Hammedata die Agagiet, bevordering gegee. Hy het hom in 'n posisie aangestel wat hoër is as enige van sy ander

amptenare. Die koning het bepaal dat al sy amptenare wat in die poort van sy paleis diens doen, voor Haman moes buig om aan hom eer te bewys. Mordegai het egter geweier om dit te doen.

Die koning se ander dienaars wat in die poort van die paleis gewerk het, het vir Mordegai gevra: “Waarom oortree jy die opdrag van die koning?” Dag na dag het hulle dit vir hom gevra, maar hy het volgehou om dit te ignoreer. Hulle het dit vir Haman gaan vertel, want hulle wou kyk of Mordegai by sy standpunt sou hou. Hy het ook vir hulle gesê dat hy ’n Jood is.

Toe Haman sien dat Mordegai nie voor hom wil buig om hom eer te bewys nie, was hy briesend. Toe hy boonop ook hoor wat Mordegai se volksverband is, was dit nie vir hom goed genoeg om net vir Mordegai dood te maak nie. Haman het na ’n manier gesoek om sommer al die Jode, die volk van Mordegai, in die hele koninkryk van Ahasveros uit te roei.

Die lot is die Pur genoem. Dit is voor Haman gewerp in die eerste maand, die maand Nisan, in die twaalfde regeringsjaar van koning Ahasveros, om ’n presiese dag en maand te kry om die Jode uit te roei. Die lot het geval op die dertiende dag van die twaalfde maand, die maand Adar.

Haman is toe na koning Ahasveros toe om vir hom te sê: “Daar is ’n sekere volk wat verspreid is in die provinsies van u koninkryk. Hulle hou hulle apart van al die ander volke. Hulle volg ander wette as dié van die ander nasies. Hulle gehoorsaam nie die wette van die koning nie. Dit is nie in die koning se belang dat hulle so lewe nie. As dit vir die koning goed is, maak dan ’n wet om hulle uit te roei. Ek sal 342 ton silwer aan die regeringsamptenare betaal om dit in die skatkis te sit.”

Die koning is oorreed. Hy het sy seëlring van sy vinger afgehaal en dit vir Haman seun van Hammedata die Agagiet, die vyand van die Jode, gegee. “Jy kan maar die geld vir jouself hou,” het die koning gesê, “maar maak met hierdie volk soos jy wil.”

Die koning se sekretaris is op die dertiende van die eerste maand laat kom. Haman het beveel dat hulle alles aan die verteenwoordigers van die koning, die goewerneurs van elke provinsie en die leiers van elke volk moes skryf. Dit was in hulle eie skrif en in hulle eie taal. Die proklamasie is geskryf in die naam van koning Ahasveros en met sy ring verseël. Briewe is met hardlopers uitgestuur na elke provinsie van die koning met die opdrag dat al die Jode geheel en al uitgeroei moes word, oud en jonk, vrou en kind. Dit moes gebeur op die dertiende

van die twaalfde maand, die maand Adar. Daar moes dan op hulle besittings beslag gelê word. 'n Afskrif van die proklamasie moes in elke provinsie as wet afgekondig word en moes aan al die volke bekendgemaak word sodat hulle op daardie dag gereed kon wees.

Boodskappers het haastig met die koninklike bevel vertrek. Ook in die vestingstad Susan is die proklamasie afgekondig. Die koning en Haman het toe gaan sit om te drink. In die stad Susan was daar groot beroering.

Toe Mordegai hoor wat gebeur het, het hy sy klere geskeur. Hy het rouklere aangetrek en as op sy kop gegooi. Hy is in die stad in en het hard en droewig loop en huil. Hy het voor die ingang van die paleis gaan staan. Iemand met rouklere aan was nie toegelaat om deur die hek in te gaan nie. In elke provinsie waar die besluit en opdrag van die koning afgekondig is, was die Jode baie hartseer. Hulle het gevas en gehuil en getreur. Baie het rouklere aangetrek en as oor hulle gegooi.

Koningin Ester se diensmeisies en die haremamptenare het haar van Mordegai kom vertel. Sy was baie ontsteld. Sy het vir hom ander klere gestuur om in die plek van sy rouklere aan te trek. Hy het geweier. Ester het vir Hatak laat kom. Hy was een van die koning se haremopsigters wat haar moes oppas. Hy moes by Mordegai gaan uitvind wat aan die gang is en hoekom hy so maak.

Hatak gaan toe na Mordegai waar hy op die plein voor die ingang van die koninklike paleis is. Mordegai het hom ingelig oor alles wat gebeur het en van die bedrag wat Haman aangebied het aan die skatkis van die koning om die Jode te kan doodmaak. Hy het ook vir Hatak 'n afskrif gegee van die proklamasie wat in Susan uitgevaardig is om hulle uit te roei. Hatak moes dit aan Ester wys en vir haar alles verduidelik. Hy moes by haar aandrang om na die koning toe te gaan en by hom om genade te smeek vir haar volk.

Hatak het met Mordegai se boodskap na Ester toe teruggegaan. Sy het Hatak weer na Mordegai gestuur om vir hom te sê: “Elke amptenaar van die koning en die volke in die provinsies van die koning weet dat enige man of vrou wat na die koning toe gaan as hulle nie ontbied is nie, volgens voorskrif net daar doodgemaak word, tensy die koning sy goue septer na so 'n persoon toe uitsteek. Dit is nou al 30 dae sedert die koning my laas laat kom het.”

Ester se woorde is aan Mordegai oorgedra. Mordegai het haar laat weet: “Moenie vir een oomblik dink dat jy daar in die koning se paleis gaan vrykom van die lot van die ander Jode nie. As jy in hierdie tyd

gaan stilbly, gaan uitkoms en redding vir die Jode van 'n ander plek af kom. Jy en jou familie sal dan uitgewis word. Wie weet of dit nie miskien juis met die oog op 'n tyd soos hierdie is dat jy koningin geword het nie!”

Ester het hom geantwoord: “Gaan maak al die Jode wat jy in Susan kan kry bymekaar. Vas ter wille van my. Vir drie dae lank moet julle dag en nag niks eet of drink nie. Ek en my diensmeisies sal net so vas. Al is dit in stryd met die voorskrif sal ek na die koning toe gaan. As ek dan daarvoor moet sterf, moet ek maar sterf.”

Mordegai het toe gegaan en alles gedoen wat Ester hom laat weet het.

Koningin Vasti het vroeër haar lewe gewaag deur te weier om te verskyn toe die koning haar laat roep het. Die gevolg was dat sy haar koninkenskap verloor het. Nou waag Ester haar lewe deur ongenooid voor dieselfde koning te verskyn.

Drie dae later het Ester haar koninklike klere aangetrek. Sy het in die binneste voorhof van die paleis gaan staan, regoor die saal waar die koning se troon is. Die koning was toe juis op sy troon met sy gesig na die ingang. Die koning was bly toe hy koningin Ester daar in die voorhof sien staan. Hy het die goue septer wat in sy hand was, na haar toe uitgesteek om haar te verwelkom. Ester het nadergekom en aan die punt van die septer gevat.

Die koning vra haar toe: “Wat het jy op die hart, koningin Ester? Wat is jou versoek? Jy sal dit kry, selfs al is dit die helfte van my koninkryk.”

Toe sê Ester: “As dit die koning behaag, sal hy en Haman dan asseblief vandag na die onthaal kom wat ek vir u voorberei het?”

Die koning sê toe: “Gaan kry gou vir Haman dat ons kan doen wat koningin Ester vra.”

Die koning en Haman is na die onthaal toe wat Ester reggemaak het. Terwyl hulle besig was om wyn te drink, vra die koning vir Ester: “Wat is jou versoek? Jy sal dit kry. Wat het jy nodig? Al is dit ook die helfte van my koninkryk wat jy nodig het, sal ek dit vir jou gee.”

Ester het geantwoord: “My wens en my versoek is soos volg: As die koning my goedgesind is en bereid is om te gee wat ek vra deur my versoek toe te staan, kom dan môre saam met Haman na die maaltyd toe wat ek vir u sal voorberei. Dan sal ek my wens aan die koning bekendmaak.”

Haman is daardie dag in 'n goeie bui en vrolik daar weg. Toe hy

egter by die ingang van die paleis op Mordegai afkom en hy weer nie opstaan om aan hom eer te bewys nie, of glad nie wys dat hy bang is vir hom nie, het hy woedend geword vir Mordegai. Haman het hom egter betoel.

Toe hy by die huis kom, het hy sy vriende en sy vrou Seres nadergeroep. Haman het by hulle gespog oor hoe ryk hy is en oor hoe baie seuns hy het. Hy het uitgewei oor die koning wat hom so vereer het en hom bo al die ander hoë amptenare en onderdane van die koning bevorder het. “En dit is ook nie al nie,” het hy verder gesê. “Koningin Ester het vandag net vir my saam met die koning uitgenooi na die onthaal wat sy gegee het. Boonop is ek uitgenooi om môre weer saam met die koning te eet. Maar dit alles help my niks solank ek teen daardie Jood Mordegai in die poort van die paleis moet vaskyk nie.”

Sy vrou Seres en sy vriende stel toe voor: “Plant ’n paal van 23 meter hoog en vra môre-oggend vir die koning dat hulle Mordegai daaraan moet ophang. Jy kan dan met ’n vrolike hart saam met die koning na die onthaal toe gaan.” Haman het gedink dit is ’n goeie voorstel. Hy het toe die galg laat implant.

Die koning kon daardie nag nie slaap nie. Hy het beveel dat die boeke oor die geskiedenis van sy koninkryk gebring moes word sodat hulle vir hom daaruit kon lees. Daarin is beskryf hoe Mordegai die twee haremamptenare Bigtan en Teres, wat diens as deurwagte gedoen het, se komplot om die koning te vermoor, aan die lig gebring het.

“Watter beloning of erkenning het Mordegai hiervoor ontvang?” wou die koning weet.

Sy amptenare het geantwoord: “Hy het niks gekry nie.”

“Wie is daar in die voorhof?” wou die koning weet. Haman was juis besig om van die buitenste voorhof van die paleis af in te kom. Hy wou by die koning toestemming kry dat Mordegai aan die galg wat Haman vir hom laat oprig het, opgehang moes word.

Die amptenare van die koning sê vir hom: “Dit is Haman wat in die voorhof staan.”

“Laat hy inkom!” sê die koning.

Toe Haman inkom, vra die koning vir hom: “Wat dink jy moet gedoen word vir iemand wat die koning graag wil vereer?”

Haman het by homself gedink: “Vir wie anders sou die koning eerder wil vereer as vir my?” Hy antwoord toe die koning: “As die koning iemand graag wil vereer, moet hulle van die koning se klere bring wat hy self gedra het en die perd waarop die koning self gery

het met die koning se embleem op sy voorkop. Die klere en die perd moet vir een van die hoogste amptenare van die koning gegee word, en hy moet die klere aantrek vir die man vir wie die koning graag wil vereer. Die amptenaar moet dan die man op die perd laat ry en hom oor die stadspaleis lei terwyl hy uitroep: ‘Dit is wat gedoen word met die persoon wat die koning graag wil vereer!’”

“Uitstekend,” sê die koning vir Haman. “Wat dadelik van my klere en my perd. Gaan doen dan soos jy voorgestel het met die Jood Mordegai wat in die poort van die paleis bly. Moet niks nalaat van alles wat jy gesê het nie.”

Haman het toe van die koning se klere gevat en ook sy perd en die klere vir Mordegai laat aantrek. Hy het hom op die rug van die perd laat sit en oor die stadspaleis gelei terwyl hy voor hom uitroep: “Dit is wat gedoen word met die persoon wat die koning graag wil vereer!”

Mordegai is toe weer terug na die poort van die paleis toe, terwyl Haman haastig huis toe is, neerslagtig en verneder. Hy het vir sy vrou Seres en al sy vriende vertel wat met hom gebeur het.

Sy raadgewers en sy vrou Seres sê toe vir hom: “As Mordegai, voor wie jy vandag die knie moes buig, ’n Jood is, is jy nie teen hom opgewasse nie. Hy is beslis jou ondergang.” Terwyl hulle nog besig was om met hom te praat, het die amptenare van die koning daar opgedaag om hom te kom haal vir die onthaal wat Ester sou gee.

Die koning en Haman het by koningin Ester aangekom om saam met haar te eet. Terwyl hulle besig was om op die tweede dag wyn te drink, vra die koning weer vir Ester: “Wat is jou versoek, koningin Ester? Ek sal dit vir jou gee. Jy kan kry net wat jy wil hê, al is dit ook die helfte van my koninkryk.”

Koningin Ester antwoord toe: “As U Majesteit my genadig wil wees, en as dit vir u reg is, dan vra ek u asseblief om my en my volk se lewens te spaar. Ek en my volk is verkoop aan hom wat ons wil doodmaak, ons wil uitwis en van die aarde af wil wegvee. As ons maar net as slawe en slavinne verkoop was, sou ek stilgebly het. Dit sou dan te onbenullig wees om die koning daarmee lastig te val.”

“Wie is dit wat so iets wil doen?” vra koning Ahasveros vir koningin Ester. “Waar is hy?”

Ester antwoord toe: “Ons vervolger en vyand is hierdie slegte Haman!”

Haman het asvaal van skrik voor die koning en koningin geword. Die koning het woedend van die ete af opgespring en uitgegaan na die tuin van die paleis. Haman het by koningin Ester agtergebly om vir sy

lewe te smee. Hy het gesien dat dit verby was met hom by die koning.

Net toe die koning van die tuin van die paleis af terugkom na die vertrek waar die onthaal gegee is, kry hy Haman besig om op die bank waarop Ester sit, neer te val.

Die koning skreeu toe vir hom: “Wil jy nou ook nog die koningin by my in my paleis verkrag?”

Die koning het bevel gegee en sy amptenare het Haman in hegtenis geneem. Garbona, een van die koning se amptenare, sê toe vir hom: “Haman het by sy huis ’n paal laat implant van 23 meter hoog om vir Mordegai, wat destyds die koning gered het, daaraan op te hang.”

Toe sê die koning: “Hang hóm daaraan op!”

Hulle het Haman toe opgehang aan die paal wat hy vir Mordegai laat oprig het. Die koning se woede het toe afgekoel.

Daardie selfde dag nog het koning Ahasveros alles wat Haman, die vyand van die Jode, besit het, vir koningin Ester gegee. Ester het vir die koning vertel hoe Mordegai aan haar verwant is. Mordegai het na die koning toe gekom. Die koning het sy seëlring afgehaal wat hy by Haman teruggevat het, en dit vir Mordegai gegee. Ester het Mordegai in beheer van Haman se besittings aangestel.

Ester en Mordegai is veilig, maar die onherroeplike proklamasie is steeds ’n bedreiging vir die ander Jode. Haman se onttroning en Mordegai se bevordering kon Ester nie gerusstel solank Haman se proklamasie teen die Jode steeds van krag gebly het nie.

Ester het toe nog ’n keer gewaag om met die koning te kom praat. Sy het huilend by sy voete neergeval en hom gesmeek om die bose plan wat Haman die Agagiet teen die Jode beraam het, tot niet te maak. Die koning het weer sy goue septer na Ester toe uitgesteek. Sy het opgestaan en voor hom kom staan.

Sy het gesê: “As dit goed is vir die koning en u my goedgesind is, en dit vir u in orde lyk, laat skryf dan ander briewe om die briewe met die plan van Haman, seun van Hammedata die Agagiet, terug te trek. Hy het daarin geskryf dat die Jode in al die provinsies van u ryk uitgeroei moet word. Ek kan mos nie net toekyk wanneer my volk deur so ’n ramp getref word nie. Hoe kan ek toelaat dat my familie uitgeroei word?”

Koning Ahasveros het toe vir koningin Ester en vir die Jood Mordegai gesê: “Kyk, ek het alles wat Haman besit het vir Ester gegee en ek het hom aan sy eie galg laat ophang omdat hy die Jode wou

uitroei. 'n Proklamasie wat reeds in die naam van die koning uitgevaardig is en met sy seëlring bevestig is, kan nooit herroep word nie. Maar skryf julle nou ook 'n brief aan die Jode met julle plan. Skryf dit as 'n verdere proklamasie in my naam en verseël dit met my seëlring.”

Die sekretarisse van die koning is ontbied. Dit was op die 23ste van die derde maand, die maand Siwan. Hulle het alles neergeskryf wat Mordegai vir die Jode, die amptenare van die koning, die goewerneurs en die leiers in die 127 provinsies van Indië af tot by Etiopië wou laat weet. Hulle het aan elke provinsie in sy eie skrif geskryf en aan elke volk in sy eie taal. Ook vir die Jode het hulle in hulle eie skrif en taal geskryf. Mordegai het namens koning Ahasveros laat skryf en die briewe met die koning se seëlring laat verseël. Die briewe is met boodskappers op resiesperde uit die koning se stalle gestuur.

In die briewe is geskryf dat die koning aan al die Jode in elke stad die vergunning gee om bymekaar te kom om hulleself te verdedig. Hulle kon enige gewapende mag van enige volk of provinsie wat hulle en hulle kinders en vroue aanval, doodmaak en vernietig en uitroei. Hulle kon op hulle besittings beslag lê. Die dag waarop hulle dit in al die provinsies van koning Ahasveros kon doen, was die dertiende van die twaalfde maand, die maand Adar.

'n Afskrif van die proklamasie moes na elke provinsie gaan en as wet afgekondig word. Al die volke moes daarvan kennis neem. Die Jode moes reg wees om hulle op daardie dag op hulle vyande te wreek.

Die boodskappers op die perde uit die koning se stalle het toe, volgens die opdrag van die koning, haastig vertrek. Die proklamasie is tegelyk ook in die hoofstad Susan afgekondig.

Toe Mordegai van die koning af weg is, was hy geklee in 'n koninklike kleed van blou en wit linne, met 'n groot goue kroon op sy kop, en 'n mantel van fyn linne en pers stof aan. Die stad Susan was verheug en baie bly oor die proklamasie. Vir die Jode was daar weer lig en vreugde en blydschap en hulle het aansien onder die ander volke gehad. In elke provinsie en in elke stad waar die besluit en proklamasie van die koning afgekondig is, was daar vreugde en blydschap onder die Jode. Hulle het 'n feesdag uitgeroep en saamgeëet. Baie mense uit die ander volksgroepe het Jode geword omdat hulle bang was vir die Jode.

Op die dertiende dag van die twaalfde maand, die maand Adar, het die twee proklamasies van die koning van krag geword. Dit was die

dag waarop die vyande van die Jode gereken het om hulle te oorweldig. Dit het egter net andersom gebeur, want die Jode het die mense wat hulle haat, oorweldig. Die Jode het oral in die stede waar hulle gewoon het en in al die provinsies van koning Ahasveros bymekaargekom om hulleself te verdedig teen almal wat hulle wou aanval. Niemand was teen hulle opgewasse nie, want al die volke was bang vir hulle. Al die leiers in die provinsies, die verteenwoordigers van die koning, die goewerneurs en die ander in diens van die koning, het die Jode gehelp omdat hulle bang was vir Mordegai. Mordegai het opgang gemaak in die koning se hofhouding. Hy het in al die provinsies bekend geword. Hy het al hoe groter mag gekry.

Die Jode het hulle vyande met die swaard oorweldig. Hulle het onder hulle vyande gemaai. In die hoofstad Susan het die Jode 500 mense doodgemaak. Hulle het ook die tien seuns van Haman die seun van Hammedata, Parsandata, Dalfon, Aspata, Porata, Adalja, Aridata, Parmasta, Arisai, Aridai en Wajesata, die vyande van die Jode, doodgemaak. Hulle het nie oorlogsbuit van hulle gevat nie.

Teen die aand van daardie dag het die koning gehoor hoeveel mense in die stad Susan doodgemaak is. Hy sê toe vir koningin Ester: “In die stad Susan alleen het die Jode 500 mense doodgemaak, en ook die tien seuns van Haman. Wat sou hulle in die ander provinsies van my ryk reggekry het! Is daar nog iets meer wat jy wil hê? Jy sal dit kry. Is daar iets waarna jy nog soek? Dit sal vir jou gedoen word.”

Ester sê toe: “As dit vir die koning in orde is, laat dan die Jode in Susan toe om môre aan te gaan waarmee hulle vandag besig was. Laat ook die lyke van die tien seuns van Haman aan hulle pa se galg opgehang word.”

Die koning het ingestem dat dit mag gebeur. Hy het so ’n proklamasie in Susan uitgevaardig. Die liggame van Haman se tien seuns is aan sy galg opgehang. Die Jode wat in Susan bly, het toe ook op die veertiende van die maand Adar bymekaargekom. Hulle het in Susan nog ’n verdere 300 mense doodgemaak. Hulle het nog steeds nie hulle eiendom as buit gevat nie.

Die ander Jode in die provinsies van die ryk het ook bymekaargekom om hulleself te verdedig. Hulle het die juk van hulle vyand afgeskud en van hulle haters 75 000 mense doodgemaak. Hulle het egter niks wat aan hulle vyand behoort het, vir hulleself as oorlogsbuit gevat nie. Dit was op die dertiende dag van die maand Adar. Op die veertiende dag van die maand het hulle gerus. Hulle het daarvan ’n dag gemaak waarop hulle feesmaaltye gemaak het en hulle

oorwinning gevier het.

Hierdie storie oor Ester en Mordegai is ook die storie oor die herkoms van een van die jaarlikse Joodse feeste, die Purimfees. Hierdie storie hou ook die herinneringe lewendig aan 'n wonderlike redding van die Joodse mense tydens koning Ahasveros se bewind.

Mordegai het laat opteken wat gebeur het. Hy het briewe gestuur aan al die Jode in al die provinsies van koning Ahasveros, aan dié wat naby bly en dié wat ver is. Hy het die Jode opdrag gegee om elke jaar op die veertiende en die vyftiende van die maand Adar fees te vier. Hulle moet op daardie dae feesvier en bly wees en vir mekaar eetgoed stuur en geskenke vir die arm mense gee. Hulle moet dit in herinnering roep as die dae waarop die Jode van hulle vyande bevry is. Hulle vrees is in blydschap verander en hulle droefheid in feesviering.

Die Jode het die opdrag in Mordegai se brief aanvaar en dit as 'n vaste instelling begin vier. Haman, die seun van Hammedata die Agagiet en vyand van die Jode, het planne gemaak om die Jode uit te roei. Hy het met die Pur, dit is die lot, beslis watter dag hy verskrikking oor hulle sou bring en hulle sou uitroei. Toe Ester egter na die koning gegaan het, het hy 'n brief laat skryf om Haman se bose plan teen die Jode op sy eie kop te laat neerkom. Hy en sy seuns is aan hulle eie galg opgehang. Dit is hoekom hierdie feesdae Purim genoem word, in aansluiting by die woord Pur. Na aanleiding van alles wat Mordegai in daardie brief geskryf het en alles wat hulle gesien en belewe het, het die Jode hulleself en hulle nageslag onherroeplik daartoe verbind om nooit na te laat om elke jaar hierdie twee dae te vier nie. Dit moes elke jaar op die voorgeskrewe wyse en op die voorgeskrewe tyd gebeur. Hierdie dae moes deur elke geslag en in elke familie, in elke provinsie en in elke stad herdenk en onderhou word. Hierdie dae van die Purim mag nooit in die Joodse gemeenskap oorgeslaan word nie. Hulle nageslag mag nooit daarvan vergeet nie.

21

Rebuilding the Walls

God had promised the people that some day he would bring them

back to their land. And, as promised, the people began to return to Judah. Once there, Zerubbabel and the prophets had spurred the people on to finish the temple, the Jews' central worship site in Jerusalem. Enter Ezra (half a century later), a respected priest and teacher of the Law living in Babylon, who took a serious interest in making sure that God's Law was heard and followed again now that the people had returned home.

DURING THE REIGN of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shal-lum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest — this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.



Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

Ezra

*Ezra son of Seraiah,
the son of Azariah,
the son of Hilkiah,
the son of Shallum,
the son of Zadok,
the son of Ahitub,
the son of Amariah,
the son of Azariah,
the son of Meraioth,
the son of Zerahiah,
the son of Uzzi,
the son of Bukki,
the son of Abishua,
the son of Phinehas,
the son of Eleazar,
the son of Aaron the chief priest.*

This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the LORD for Israel:

Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, teacher of the Law of the God of heaven:

Greetings.

Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who volunteer to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of your God, which is in your hand. Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the temple of their God in Jerusalem. With this money be sure to buy bulls, rams and male lambs, together

with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and sacrifice them on the altar of the temple of your God in Jerusalem.

You and your fellow Israelites may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of your God. Deliver to the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the temple of your God. And anything else needed for the temple of your God that you are responsible to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.

Now I, King Artaxerxes, decree that all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates are to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, the teacher of the Law of the God of heaven, may ask of you — up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without limit. Whatever the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the temple of the God of heaven. Why should his wrath fall on the realm of the king and of his sons? You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, temple servants or other workers at this house of God.

And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates — all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. Whoever does not obey the law of your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.

Praise be to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way and who has extended his good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of the LORD my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

Loaded down with the king's gifts and supplies, Ezra led several thousand fellow Israelites on a journey to Jerusalem. He found the temple in good order, but he also discovered that the people were

intermarrying with neighboring cultures who worshiped other gods. God's Law clearly warned the people against such actions. Appalled, Ezra tore his clothes in grief and wept as he prayed, confessing the people's sin and asking for God's mercy. Convicted by Ezra's display of remorse, the people of Jerusalem repented.

About 13 years later, Nehemiah, cupbearer to the king of Persia (a position requiring the highest level of security clearance), received a visit from his brother who lived in Judah. Nehemiah was anxious to hear news of the city of Jerusalem. But as Ezra had discovered earlier, the news from home wasn't so good.

The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

"LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you.

"Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man."

The temple in Jerusalem was completed, but the wall of the city still lay in ruins. A city without a wall? Might as well just invite the

pillagers to walk through the open doors. Nehemiah decided he would lead the people in rebuilding the city's walls.

A mission of this scope required permission from Artaxerxes, king of Persia. After praying for God's help, Nehemiah approached the king, who was pleased to send Nehemiah on his way with letters for safe-conduct and supplies. Hard work lay ahead, long days and restless nights, but Nehemiah packed and led his caravan toward Jerusalem.

I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few others. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work.

Just as the Jews had received opposition from the neighboring peoples when they worked at rebuilding the temple a century earlier, they came under attack for trying to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, and Tobiah, a leading official and perhaps governor of Transjordan, were undoubtedly particularly threatened by the fact that King Artaxerxes had not only provided for

Nehemiah's journey to Jerusalem but had also appointed him governor of Judah.

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble — burned as they are?"

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building — even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!"

Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.

So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."

Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!”

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, “Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and as workers by day.” Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.

Nehemiah showed steady persistence and grace under pressure. He moved ahead while every indicator showed trouble. He also showed a savvy perception of human nature, as he could smell a trap a mile away.

When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it — though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates — Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet

together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.”

But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter in which was written:

“It is reported among the nations — and Geshem says it is true — that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us meet together.”

I sent him this reply: “Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head.”

They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, “Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.”

But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.”

One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, “Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you — by night they are coming to kill you.”

So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days.

When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

First the temple and now the walls of the city were complete. But why build temples and walls if people's hearts were still wandering? Both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to ensure that a pure system of worship was in place and to enforce the laws against intermarriage with people of ungodly nations. What better way than to let God's Word speak for itself?

After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed. I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do.

All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

The Levites — Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shab-bethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah — instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all,

“This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

The Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve.”

Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law. They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters” — as it is written.

So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

The Israelites had indeed rebuilt the temple and were worshiping God again; yet many of the people and priests strayed from the faith. God called Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, to offer a

final word to the people. Malachi likely lived in the same period as Ezra and Nehemiah. Perhaps his prophecies came after Ezra's death and during the time when Nehemiah was called to return to the service of the king of Persia. Through Malachi, God issued his warnings against the people's hypocrisy, but also reminded them of his never-ending covenant promise.

A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.

“A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the LORD Almighty.

“It is you priests who show contempt for my name.

“But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’

“By offering defiled food on my altar.

“But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’

“By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the LORD Almighty.

“Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?” — says the LORD Almighty.

“Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD Almighty, “and I will accept no offering from your hands. My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD Almighty.

Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You

weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

“The man who hates and divorces his wife,” says the LORD, the God of Israel, “does violence to the one he should protect,” says the LORD Almighty.

So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

“I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

“In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse — your whole nation — because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the LORD Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the LORD Almighty.

“You have spoken arrogantly against me,” says the LORD.

“Yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’

“You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by

carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.”

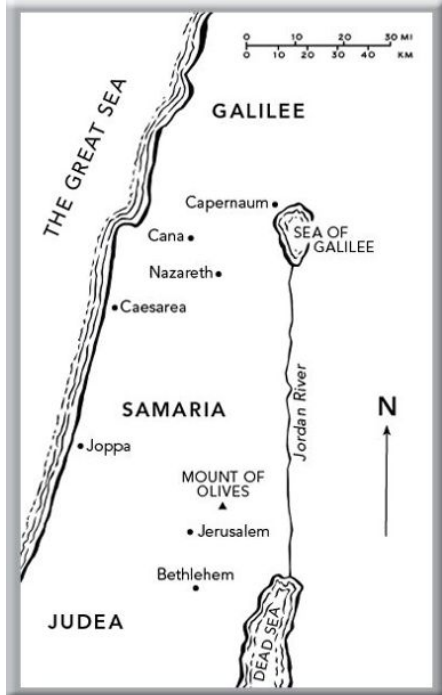
Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name.

“On the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty, “they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty.

“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

“See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”



FOR 400 YEARS after Malachi's prophecies, no prophets or leaders rose to the level of inclusion in the record of Holy Scripture. For this reason, the period is sometimes referred to as the "silent years." In actuality, these years of social and political upheaval were anything but silent for the Jewish people.

The Maccabean revolt against the Seleucids during the second century BC was one of the most heroic eras of Jewish history. During these 400 years numerous significant writings were produced as well. The Qumran community copied the books of Isaiah, the Psalms, Deuteronomy and other sacred writings. These ancient manuscripts were discovered by a shepherd boy in AD 1947 near the Dead Sea and are known today as the "Dead Sea Scrolls."

The Deuterocanonical books, or books of the Apocrypha, accepted as Holy Scripture by the Roman and Eastern churches, were written in the years between the Old and New Testament. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the old Testament, was also an important product of the period. It became the Bible for Greek-speaking Jews outside Palestine and later for the early church.

But God's story wasn't finished. "When the set time had fully

come,” as the apostle Paul put it, God spoke again—this time in the person of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, whose birth, life, death and resurrection changed everything.

Now the prophets’ ancient promises of a new Servant-King and kingdom of God, the promises anticipated for so many years, came to life in bold new ways. Now the people could see personified God’s gracious, compassionate, unfailing love and dedication to restoring lost relationships through this carpenter and itinerant teacher, Jesus — the Messiah ¹ come to set his people free. All the wisdom and purposes of God centered in Jesus’ mission on planet Earth. He was God’s final word. And this is how it happened ...

¹Messiah: A name of Jesus that emphasizes his role as God’s chosen deliverer.

Herbou die mure

God het die mense belowe dat Hy hulle eendag sal terugbring na hulle land. En soos belowe, het die mense begin terugkeer na Juda. Serubbabel en die ander profete het die mense aangemoedig om die tempel te voltooi, die Jode se sentrale aanbiddingsplek in Jerusalem. Esra verskyn 'n halfeeu later op die toneel, 'n gerespekteerde priester en onderwyser van die Wet wat verseker dat God se Wet gehoor en gevolg word noudat die mense teruggekeer het huis toe.

Baie jare later, in die tyd toe koning Artasasta van Persië regeer het, het Esra op die toneel verskyn. Hy was die seun van Seraja, die seun van Asarja, seun van Gilkija, seun van Sallum, seun van Sadok, seun van Agitub, seun van Amarja, seun van Asarja, seun van Merajot, seun van Seragja, seun van Ussi, seun van Bukki, seun van Abisua, seun van Pinehas, seun van Eleasar, seun van Aäron die hoëpriester. Esra het uit Babel gekom en was 'n geleerde man. Hy het baie goeie kennis gehad van die gebooie van Moses wat die HERE, die God van Israel, vir hom gegee het. In die sewende jaar van koning Artasasta se regering, het van die mense van Israel saam met hom na Jerusalem toe gegaan. Onder hulle was priesters, Leviete, sangers, hekwagte en tempelwerkers.



Esra het in Augustus van daardie jaar in Jerusalem aangekom. Esra het Babel op 8 April verlaat en op 4 Augustus in Jerusalem aangekom, want sy God het hom beskerm. Dit het gebeur omdat Esra besluit het om die gebooie van die HERE te bestudeer en toe te pas. Hy wou die reëls en regulasies vir die mense van Israel leer.

Esra

Esra seun van Seraja,
die seun van Asarja,
seun van Gilkija,
seun van Sallum,
seun van Sadok,
seun van Agitub,
seun van Amarja,
seun van Asarja,
seun van Merajot,
seun van Seragja,
seun van Ussi,
seun van Bukki,
seun van Abisua,
seun van Pinehas,
seun van Eleaser,
seun van Aäron die hoëpriester.

Hier volg 'n afskrif van koning Artasasta se brief aan Esra. Esra was 'n priester en 'n skrifkenner wat die voorskrifte en bepalings van die HERE vir Israel uitgelê het:

“Van: Artasasta, die koning van die konings.

“Aan: Die priester Esra, die kenner van die wet van die God van die hemel.

“Groete.

“Ek verklaar dat enige van die mense van Israel wat in my ryk is, priesters en Leviëte ingesluit, mag kies om saam met jou na Jerusalem toe terug te keer. Ek en my raad van sewe gee jou opdrag om ondersoek in te stel na omstandighede in Juda en Jerusalem. Doen dit aan die hand van die voorskrifte van jou God wat in jou besit is. Ek as koning en my raadgewers gee jou ook opdrag om silwer en goud saam met jou te vat. Ons gee dit as 'n vrywillige bydrae aan die God van Israel wat in Jerusalem woon. Neem ook al die silwer en goud wat jy in die provinsie Babilonië in die hande kan kry. Verder ook die vrywillige offers wat die mense van die land en die priesters vir die tempel van hulle God in Jerusalem gee. Gebruik hierdie bydraes uitsluitlik om bulle, ramme, lammers en die nodige graanoffers en drankoffers te koop. Dit is vir alles wat julle op die altaar van die

tempel van God in Jerusalem gaan offer.

“Die goud en die silwer wat oorbly, mag jy en jou mense gebruik soos julle goeddink volgens die wil van julle God. Maar die voorwerpe wat ons aan jou gegee het vir diens in die tempel van jou God, moet jy net so vir die God van Jerusalem gaan gee. As jy nog iets nodig het vir die tempel van jou God en geld kortkom, mag jy dit uit die koninklike fondse vat.

“Ek, koning Artasasta, gee die volgende opdrag aan al die amptenare van die tesourie in die provinsie wes van die Eufraatrivier: ‘Julle moet vir Esra alles gee wat hy julle vra, want hy is ’n priester en kenner van die bevele van die God van die hemel. Hy mag tot soveel as drie en ’n half ton silwer, sestion en ’n half ton graan, 2 200 liter wyn, 2 200 liter olyfolie en ’n onbeperkte voorraad sout aanvra. Julle moet enigiets wat die God van die hemel vir sy tempel vereis, voorsien. Daar is geen rede waarom ons die risiko moet loop om sy woede teen die ryk van die koning en van sy nageslag te laat ontvlam nie. Ek gee ook opdrag dat geen priester, Leviet, sanger, deurwag, tempelwerker of enige werker in hierdie tempel van God verplig mag word om enige belasting te betaal nie.’

“En jy, Esra, moet met die wysheid wat God jou gegee het, amptenare en registers aanstel oor die mense van die provinsie wes van die Eufraatrivier. Hulle moet die wette van jou God ken. As hulle hierdie wette nie ken nie, moet jy dit vir hulle leer. Enigiemand wat nie die wet van jou God of die wet van die koning gehoorsaam nie, moet julle dadelik straf met die dood, verbanning, konfiskering van besittings of tronkstraf.”

Loof die HERE, die God van ons voorouers wat die koning laat besluit het om op hierdie manier eer te bring aan die tempel van die HERE in Jerusalem. Hy het met sy troue liefde gesorg dat ek die agting van die koning, sy raadgewers en sy sleutelamptenare geniet! Ek het moed geskep toe ek besef dat ek die hulp van die HERE my God het. Toe het ek van die leiers van Israel byeengebring om saam met my na Jerusalem toe terug te gaan.

Swaar gelaai met die koning se geskenke en voorraad, het Esra duisende mede-Israeliete op ’n reis na Jerusalem gelei. Hy het die tempel in ’n goeie toestand gevind, maar het ook ontdek dat die mense getrou het met mense uit die buurstate wat ander gode aanbid het. God se wet het die mense duidelik hierteen gewaarsku. Ontsteld het Esra sy klere geskeur en gehuil terwyl hy gebid het. Hy het die mense

se sonde bely en om God se genade gesmeek. Skuldig bevind deur Esra se berou het die mense van Jerusalem hulle sondes bely.

Ongeveer dertien jaar later het Nehemia, die koning van Persië se wynkelner (’n posisie wat die hoogste sekuriteitsklaring vereis het), besoek ontvang van sy broer wat in Juda gewoon het. Nehemia was angstig vir nuus oor die stad Jerusalem. Maar soos Esra vroeër ontdek het, was die nuus van die huis af nie so goed nie.

Hier is die gedenkskrif van Nehemia, die seun van Gakalja.

In die twintigste jaar van Artasasta se koningskap, in November, was ek by sy vestingstad Susan. Ganani, een van my broers, het my saam met ander persone uit Juda kom besoek. Ek het hulle uitgevra oor die Jode wat die ballingskap oorleef het en oor die omstandighede in Jerusalem.

Hulle antwoord was: “Dit gaan nie goed met die mense wat uit die ballingskap teruggekeer het en daar oorgebly het nie. In die provinsie Juda is daar groot ellende en bespotting. Jerusalem se muur lê om en die stadspoorte is deur vuur vernietig.”

Toe ek dit hoor, het ek gaan sit en huil. Vir dae aaneen het ek getreur, gevas en tot die God van die hemel gebid. Ek het gesê:

“HERE, God van die hemel, U is die groot en vreesaanjaende God. U hou by u verbondsbelofte. U is getrou in u liefde teenoor dié wat u gebooi liefhet en gehoorsaam. Hoor my gebed! Kyk, en U sal sien dat ek dag en nag vir die mense van Israel, u dienaars, intree in gebed. Ek bely dat ons teen U gesondig het. Selfs ook ek en my familie het sonde gedoen!

“Here, hoor asseblief my gebed! Luister na ons gebede, ons wat U graag wil eer. Laat my tog vandag suksesvol wees wanneer ek die koning ’n groot guns vra. Laat hy my goedgesind wees.”

Die tempel van Jerusalem was voltooi, maar die stadsmuur was nog nie reg nie. ’n Stad sonder ’n stadsmuur? Jy kan netsowel die plunderaars nooi om by die voordeur in te stap. Nehemia het besluit hy sou die mense lei in die herbou van die muur.

Vir so ’n groot taak het Nehemia toestemming nodig gehad van Artasasta, die koning van Persië. Nadat hy vir God om hulp gebid het, het Nehemia na die koning toe gegaan wat hom met graagte gestuur het met briewe van veilige deurgang en voorraad. Daar het harde

werk, lang dae en slapelose nagte voorgelê, maar Nehemia het alles opgepak en sy karavaan na Jerusalem gelei.

Drie dae ná my aankoms in Jerusalem het ek en 'n paar ander mense in die nag uitgesluip. Ek het toe nog vir niemand vertel van die planne wat God oor Jerusalem in my wakker gemaak het nie. Ons het geen pakkdiere saam met ons gevat nie, behalwe die donkie waarop ek gery het.

Dié nag het ek by die Valleipoort uitgegaan, verby die Jakkalsfontein tot by die Mispoort. Ek het die beskadigde mure van Jerusalem en die afgebrande hekke gaan ondersoek. Daarna het ek na die Fonteinhek en die Koningsdam gery, maar my donkie kon nie deur die bourommel loop nie. Ek het toe in plaas daarvan in die Kidronvallei op beweeg. Ek het die muur ondersoek en daarna teruggedraai en weer deur die Valleipoort die stad binnegegaan. Die amptenare van die stad het nie geweet dat ek uitgegaan het of waarmee ek besig was nie. Ek het nog nie die Jode oor my planne ingelig nie. Ek het ook nog nie met die godsdienstige of die politieke leiers daaroor gepraat nie, ook nie met die amptenare of die mense wat die werk sou doen nie.

Hierna het ek egter vir hulle gesê: “Julle sien self in hoe 'n benarde posisie ons is. Jerusalem is verwoes en die stadshekke is verbrand! Maar kom ons begin die mure van Jerusalem herbou sodat ons nie langer verleë hoef te wees nie.” Toe het ek hulle begin vertel hoe goed God vir my voorsien het en van my gesprek met die koning.

Hulle het dadelik reageer en gesê: “Dit is reg so. Kom ons bou die muur weer op!” Hulle het toe met die goeie werk begin.

Net soos die Jode 'n eeu gelede teenstand van die naburige mense gekry het toe hulle die tempel herbou het, is hulle weer aangeval toe hulle Jerusalem se mure wou herbou. Sanballat, die goewerneur van Samaria, en Tobija, 'n voorste amptenaar en dalk die goewerneur van Transjordanïë, het ongetwyfeld bedreig gevoel deur die feit dat koning Artasasta Nehemia nie net voorsien het van voorrade vir die reis nie, maar hom ook goewerneur van Juda gemaak het.

Toe Sanballat hoor dat hulle besig was om die muur te herstel, was hy baie kwaad. Hy het in woede uitgebars en smalend met die Jode gepraat. Hy het voor sy vriende en die leer van Samaria uitgevaar: “Wat dink hierdie armsalige Jode doen hulle? Dink hulle miskien hulle kan die muur in een dag bou as hulle net genoeg offers bring?

Kyk net hoe lyk die swartgebrande klippe wat hulle onder die rommel uitkrap om weer te gebruik!”

Tobija die Ammoniet wat langs hom gestaan het, het gesê: “Daardie klipmuur sal omval selfs as ’n jakkals daarop loop!”

“O God, hoor ons tog, want ons word verag. Laat hulle beledigings teen hulle draai. Laat hulle self die buit wees, gevangenes in ’n ander land! Moenie hulle skuld oorsien nie. Moet ook nie hulle sondes sommer net voor U uitvee nie, want hulle het U uitgelok om hier voor die bouers u woede te wys.”

Die mense het baie hard gewerk. Uiteindelik was die muur reg rondom die stad tot halfpad die oorspronklike hoogte herbou. Die werk het gevorder en hulle het die gapings in die muur herstel. Toe Sanballat, Tobija, die Arabiere, die Ammoniete en die mense van Asdod dit hoor, het hulle baie kwaad geword. Hulle het almal planne beraam om teen Jerusalem te veg. Hulle wou kom om verwarring te veroorsaak. Maar ons het tot ons God gebid. Ons het die stad dag en nag bewaak om onself teen hulle te beskerm.

Maar die mense van Juda het begin sê: “Die bouers is besig om moeg te word en daar is baie rommel wat ons moet verwyder. Ons sal die muur nie alleen kan bou nie.

“Boonop sê ons vyande: ‘Voordat hulle besef wat gebeur, is ons tussen hulle. Dan maak ons hulle dood en bring ’n einde aan die bouery.’”

Die Jode wat naby die vyand gebly het, het herhaaldelik vir ons kom sê: “Hulle sal uit alle rigtings kom om ons aan te val!”

Ek het toe wagte agter die laagste dele van die muur geplaas waar daar oop gedeeltes was. Ek het ook mense by die families laat wagstaan, gewapen met swaarde, spiese en boë. Ek het sake dopgehou en toe die leiers, die amptenare en die res van die volk bymekaargeroep en gesê: “Moenie vir die vyand bang wees nie! Hou in gedagte dat die Here groot en vreesaanjaend is. Veg vir julle vriende, julle seuns en julle dogters, julle vroue en julle huise!”

Toe ons vyande hoor dat ons van hulle planne weet en dat God dit in die wiele gery het, kon elkeen van ons weer na ons werk aan die muur teruggaan.

Maar van toe af kon net die helfte van my mense met die werk aangaan. Die ander het met harnasse aan waggestaan, gewapen met spiese, skilde en boë. Die offisiere het agter die mense van Juda posisie ingeneem terwyl hulle aan die muur gebou het. Die werkers

wat die boumateriaal aangedra het, het hulle werk met net een hand gedoen. In die ander hand was 'n wapen. Al die bouers het gewerk met 'n swaard aan hulle sye vasgemaak. Die trompetblaser het by my gebly om alarm te maak.

Ek het vir die leiers, amptenare en die res van die volk verduidelik: “Kyk, ons werk oor 'n groot gebied en ons is ver van mekaar af al langs die muur versprei. As julle die trompet hoor blaas, kom vinnig by daardie punt bymekaar. Ons God sal vir ons veg!”

Ons het van vroeg tot laat gewerk, van sonsopkoms tot sonsondergang. Een helfte van die mense was altyd op wag, gewapen met spiese. Ek het ook almal wat buite die mure gebly het, beveel om in Jerusalem te kom slaap. Op dié manier kon hulle en hulle slawe in die nag help wagstaan en bedags met die werk help. In dié tyd het niemand van ons ooit ons klere uitgetrek nie – nie ek of my familie of my diensknegte of die wagte wat by my was nie. Ons het ons wapens te alle tye saam met ons gedra, selfs wanneer ons water gaan drink het.

Nehemia het standvastige deursettingsvermoë en grasia getoon onder die druk. Hy het vorentoe gebeur terwyl alle tekens daarop gedui het dat daar moeilikheid sal wees. Hy het ook begrip getoon vir die menslike natuur en kon 'n lokval 'n myl ver ruik.

Sanballat, Tobija, die Arabier Gesem en die ander vyande het gehoor dat ek die bouwerk aan die muur voltooi het. Daar was geen opening meer in die muur nie. Hulle moes wel nog die deure in die poorte hang. Toe stuur Sanballat en Gesem vir my 'n boodskap met die versoek dat ek hulle in een van die dorpieë in die Onolaagte moes ontmoet.

Ek het besef dat hulle beplan het om my kwaad aan te doen. Ek het toe vir hulle 'n boodskap teruggestuur: “Ek is met 'n groot taak besig, ek kan nie nou daarmee ophou en julle ontmoet nie.” Hulle het die boodskap vier keer vir my gestuur en elke keer het ek vir hulle dieselfde antwoord teruggestuur.

Die vyfde keer het Sanballat sy assistent na my gestuur met 'n oop brief in sy hand. In die brief het daar gestaan:

“Gesem het my vertel dat die mense onder mekaar praat en sê dat jy en die Jode 'n opstand beplan. Dit is hoekom julle die muur bou. Volgens die gerugte het jy planne om hulle koning te word. Hy vertel ook dat jy profete aangestel het om in Jerusalem oor jou te profeteer.

Hulle sê glo: ‘Daar is nou ’n koning in Juda!’ Die koning sal sonder enige twyfel van hierdie gerugte te hore kom. My voorstel is dat jy liewer kom en die saak met my kom bespreek.”

Ek het toe die volgende antwoord vir hom gestuur: “Daar is nie ’n greintjie waarheid in jou storie nie. Dit is goed wat jy self uitgedink het.”

Dit was bloot hulle manier om ons te intimideer. Hulle het gedink dit sou ons moedeloos maak en dat die werk tot stilstand sou kom.

Ek het vir krag gebid dat die werk kon voortgaan.

Semaja seun van Delaja en kleinseun van Mehetabel was in sy huis toegesluit. Ek het hom gaan besoek. Hy het gesê: “Kom ons ontmoet mekaar in die tempel van God en sluit die deure van die tempel. U vyande is op pad om u vannag te kom doodmaak.”

Op 2 Oktober is die muur uiteindelik voltooi. Dit was net 52 dae vandat ons begin bou het.

Toe die nuus ons vyande bereik en die volke in die omgewing sien wat gebeur het, was hulle uit die veld geslaan. Hulle het besef dat ons God ons met hierdie werk gehelp het.

Eers is die tempel voltooi en nou die stadsmure. Maar hoekom tempels en mure bou as mense se harte nog gedwaal het? Beide Esra en Nehemia wou verseker dat daar ’n rein aanbiddingstelsel in plek is en dat die wette teen huwelike met mense van heidennasies toegepas word. Wat ’n beter manier as om toe te laat dat God se Woord self praat.

Nadat ons die muur klaar gebou het, het ek die hekke gehang. Daarna het ons die hekwagte, sangers en die Leviëte aangestel. Ek het my broer Ganani en Gananja, die bevelvoerder van die vesting, in bevel van Jerusalem geplaas. Gananja was ’n meer betroubare en godvresende persoon as enige van die ander mense.

Die mense het toe almal op die plein voor die Waterpoort bymekaargekom. Hulle het die skrywer Esra gevra om die wetboek van Moses waarin die be vele van die HERE vir Israel was, te bring.

Die priester Esra het die wetboek op 8 Oktober na die byeenkoms toe gebring. Daar was mans, vroue en kinders wat reeds kon verstaan, teenwoordig. Op die plein voor die Waterpoort het hy daaruit voorgelees vir almal wat kon verstaan. Hy het van vroeg die môre af

tot die middag toe daaruit vir hulle voorgelees. Almal het baie aandagtig na die wetboek geluister.

Al die mense kon Esra op die verhoog sien staan. Toe hulle sien dat hy die boek oopmaak, het almal opgestaan. Esra het die HERE, die groot God geprys. Die mense het hierop “Amen! Amen!” gesê terwyl hulle hulle hande na die hemel toe uitstrek. Almal het voor die HERE gekniel en met hulle gesigte laag teen die grond neergebuig.

Die Leviete Jesua, Bani, Serebja, Jamin, Akkub, Sabbetai, Hodija, Maäseja, Kelita, Asarja, Josabad, Ganan en Pelaja het die gebooie uitgelê aan die mense wat daar gestaan het. Hulle het uit God se wetboek voorgelees en mooi verduidelik wat dit beteken. Hulle het seker gemaak die mense verstaan wat gelees is.

Die mense het begin huil toe hulle hoor wat in die boek staan. Toe het Nehemia vir die goewerneur, die priester en skrywer Esra en vir die Leviete wat die gebooie vir die mense verduidelik het, gesê: “Julle moenie treur of huil nie, vandag is ’n spesiale dag wat aan die HERE, julle God, gewy is.”

Hy het ook vir hulle gesê: “Gaan eet ’n lekker maaltyd en drink soet drankies. Deel ook van die kos met mense wat niks voorberei het nie. Hierdie is ’n dag wat aan ons God toegewy is. Moenie terneergedruk wees nie, want die blydschap wat die HERE gee, sal julle krag wees!”

Die Leviete het die volk ook getroos en vir hulle gesê: “Wees stil! Moenie huil nie! Hierdie dag is spesiaal, dit is aan die HERE toegewy.”

Die mense het toe weggegaan om ’n feesmaal te eet en te drink en hulle kos met ander mense te deel. Hulle het goed verstaan wat voorgelees is. Dit het hulle baie bly gemaak.

Op 9 Oktober het die familieleiers, die priesters en die Leviete by Esra bymekaargekom om die wetboek verder te bespreek. In hulle bestudering van die voorskrifte het hulle ontdek dat die HERE deur Moses die Israëliete beveel het om gedurende die fees wat hulle in dié maand vier, in hutte te bly. Hy het gesê dat hulle in al die dorpe en veral in Jerusalem die volgende boodskap moet aankondig: “Gaan haal olyftakke, olienhouttakke, mirteboomtakke, palmtakke en vyeboomtakke in die heuwels. Maak hutte daarvan soos vir julle voorgeskryf is.”

Die mense het toe uitgegaan en die takke gaan sny. Hulle het die takke gebruik om op die platdakke van hulle huise of in die binnehowe van hulle huise hutte te maak. Ander het hutte in die binneplein van die tempel gemaak of op die pleine by die Waterpoort en die Efraimspoort. Almal wat uit gevangenskap teruggekeer het, het

vir die sewe dae van die fees in hierdie hutte gebly. Hulle het laas in die tyd van Josua die seun van Nun so feesgevier. Daar was groot blydskap onder hulle!

Esra het elke dag, vir sewe dae lank, uit die Wetboek van God voorgelees. Sewe dae lank het hulle so feesgevier. Op 15 Oktober, die agtste dag van die fees, het hulle, soos voorgeskryf, 'n plegtige byeenkoms gehou.

Die Israëliete het inderdaad die tempel herbou en het God weer aanbid; tog het baie van die mense en priesters afgedwaal van die geloof. God het vir Maleagi, die laaste van die Ou-Testamentiese profete, opgeroep om 'n laaste woord aan die mense te bring. Maleagi het in dieselfde tyd as Esra en Nehemia geleef. Sy profesieë het dalk na Esra se dood gekom en tydens die tyd dat Nehemia teruggeroep is na die diens van die koning van Persië. God het deur Maleagi sy waarskuwings gerig oor die mense se skynheiligheid, maar hulle ook aan sy ewigdurende verbondsbelofte herinner.

Die HERE het vir Maleagi 'n boodskap gegee om aan Israel oor te dra.

Vir die priesters sê die HERE, die Almagtige: “'n Seun eer sy pa en 'n slaaf sy meester. Ek is julle Vader en julle Meester, maar waar is die eer en respek wat My toekom?

“Julle het My geminag! Maar julle vra: ‘Op watter wyse het ons U geminag?’

“Julle bring vir My offers van voedsel wat besoedeld is.

“Dan vra julle: ‘Hoe het ons u offer onrein gemaak?’

“Julle het dit gedoen deur te sê die HERE se altaar kan maar geminag word.” Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Is dit nie verkeerd as julle blinde diere bring om te offer nie? Is dit nie ook verkeerd om lam en siek diere te offer nie? Bring 'n bietjie sulke geskenke vir julle goewerneur en kyk of hy daarmee tevrede sal wees en julle vriendelik sal ontvang!

“Roep God aan en smee Hom om julle genadig te wees! Maar as dit die soort offers is wat julle bring, hoekom sal Ek julle goedgesind wees?” vra die HERE, die Almagtige.

“Ek wens iemand van julle wil die tempeldeure toesluit sodat julle nie meer nuttelose offers kan bring nie! Ek is glad nie tevrede met julle nie. Ek stel nie in julle offers belang nie,” sê die HERE, die Almagtige. “Daar is nasies wat My eer van waar die son opkom tot

waar dit weer ondergaan. Oral eer hulle My deur wierookoffers en rein offers te bring. Die nasies het groot ontsag vir my Naam,” sê die HERE, die Almagtige.

Daar is nog iets wat julle doen. Julle stort trane by die HERE se altaar. Julle huil en kerm, maar Hy aanvaar nie julle offers met goeie guns nie. Julle roep uit: “Hoekom nie?” Dis omdat die HERE ’n getuie was toe jy en jou vrou julle beloftes aan mekaar gemaak het. Maar jy was ontrou aan haar ten spyte daarvan dat sy getrou as jou metgesel gebly het, die vrou aan wie jy jou huweliksbeloftes gemaak het.

Het die HERE dan nie man en vrou een gemaak nie, een in liggaam en gees? Hoekom het Hy hulle een gemaak? Omdat God wou hê daar moet kinders vir Hom voortspruit. Wees op julle hoede. Moenie ontrou wees aan die vrou van jou jeug nie.

Die HERE, die God van Israel, sê: “Ek haat egskeiding! Om te skei is net so gewelddadig soos om ’n slagoffer se bebloede baadjie aan te trek.”

Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Wees verantwoordelik en moenie ontrou wees nie!”

“Ek is die HERE, Ek verander nie. Daarom, nageslag van Israel, is julle nie heeltemal uitgewis nie. Van die tyd van julle voorouers af het julle afgewyk van my voorskrifte en hulle nie gehoorsaam nie.” Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Keer terug na My toe en Ek sal na julle toe terugkeer.

“Maar julle vra: ‘Hoe moet ons terugkeer?’

“Sal mense God ooit besteel? Tog het julle My bedrieg!

“Julle vra: ‘Wat bedoel U? Wanneer het ons U ooit bedrieg?’

“Julle het die tiendes en offerandes gesteel! Daar rus ’n vloek op julle, want julle hele volk besteel My.” Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Bring al die tiendes na die stoorkamers sodat daar genoeg kos in my tempel kan wees. Toets My hierin of Ek nie vir julle die vensters van die hemel sal oopmaak nie. Ek sal voorspoed op julle laat reën wat meer as genoeg vir julle sal wees!” Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Ek sal sorg dat insekte julle oes nie verwoes nie en julle wingerde op die landerye nie misluk nie. Dan sal al die nasies julle as geseënd beskou omdat julle land begeerlik is.” Dit is wat die HERE, die Almagtige, sê.

Die HERE sê: “Julle sê verskriklike dinge van My.

“Maar julle sê: ‘Wat het ons van U gesê?’

“Julle het gesê: ‘Dis tevergeefs om God te dien. Wat het ons daarby gebaat om sy voorskrifte na te kom of om die HERE, die Almagtige, te

wys dat ons berou het oor ons sonde? Kwaaddoeners word ryk, en mense wat God uitdaag, kom skotvry daarvan af. Daarom sal ons voortaan sê: Verwaande mense is gelukkig.”

Die HERE wat die HERE dien, het toe met mekaar gepraat. Die HERE het na hulle geluister en gehoor wat hulle sê. Hulle het ’n gedenkboek in sy teenwoordigheid geskryf. Dit het die name bevat van mense wat die HERE met ontsag dien en graag aan Hom dink.

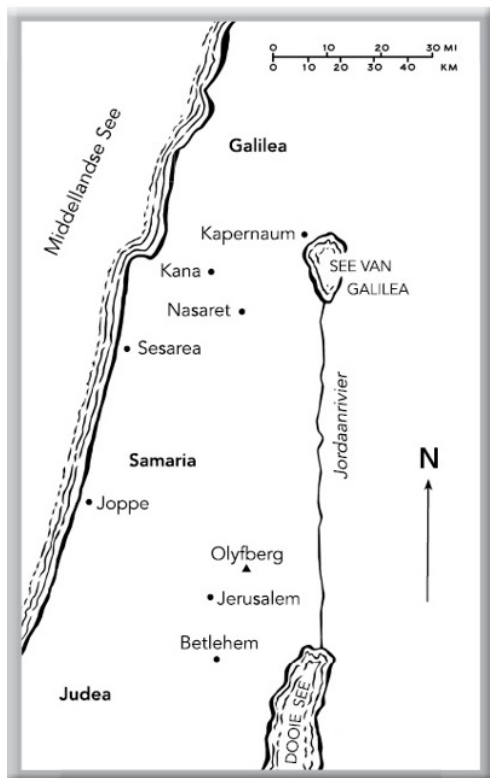
Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Die dag as Ek ingryp, sal hulle my kosbare besitting wees. Ek sal sagkens met hulle werk, soos ’n pa met sy kind wat lojaal aan hom is. Dan sal julle weer die verskil sien tussen mense wat reg doen en goddelose mense, die verskil tussen mense wat God dien en dié wat Hom nie dien nie.”

Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Die dag kom en dit brand soos ’n vuuroond. Op dié dag sal alle verwaande, alle goddelose mense soos kaf deur vuur verteer word. Niks sal oorbly nie, nie wortel of tak nie. Maar die Son van Geregtigheid, met genesing in sy vlerke, sal opkom vir julle wat eerbied en respek vir My het. Julle sal uitgaan en vrolik rondspring soos kalwers wat uit die kraal kom.” Die HERE, die Almagtige, sê: “Op dié dag sal julle die goddeloses vertrap asof hulle stof onder julle voete is.

“Moenie vergeet om die voorskrifte van my dienskneg Moses te gehoorsaam nie. Dit behels al die reëls en regulasies wat Ek hom op Sinai beveel het om vir die hele Israel te gee.

“Kyk, voordat die groot en angswekkende Dag van die HERE aanbreek, stuur Ek die profeet Elia na julle toe. Hy sal ouers met hulle kinders versoen en kinders met hulle ouers. As dit nie gebeur nie, sal Ek die land tref met vernietiging.”

Die Heilige Land in Jesus se tyd



Vir 400 jaar ná Maleagi se profesieë het daar geen ander profete of leiers tot op die vlak gevorder waar hulle in die Heilige Skrif ingesluit is nie. Om hierdie rede word daar dikwels na hierdie tydperk verwys as die “stil jare”. In werklikheid was hierdie jare van sosiale en politieke onrus allesbehalwe stil vir die Joodse mense.

Die Makkabese opstand teen die Seleukiete gedurende die tweede eeu voor Christus was een van die mees heroïese eras in die Joodse geskiedenis. Gedurende hierdie 400 jaar het verskeie belangrike geskrifte die lig gesien. Die Koemraan-gemeenskap het die boeke van Jesaja, die Psalms, Deuteronomium en ander heilige geskrifte oorgeskryf. Hierdie antieke geskrifte is in 1947 deur ’n skaapwagterseun ontdek naby die Dooie See en staan vandag bekend as die “Dooie See-rolle”.

Die Deutero-kanonieke boeke, of boeke van die Apokriewe, wat deur die Roomse en Oosterse kerke as Heilige Geskrifte beskou word, is geskryf in die jare tussen die Ou en Nuwe Testament. Die Septuagint, die Griekse vertaling van die Ou Testament, is ook ’n belangrike produk van hierdie

tyd. Dit het vir Griekssprekende Jode buite Palestina en later vir die vroeë kerk die Bybel geword.

Maar God se storie was nie klaar nie. “Toe die regte tyd aangebreek het,” soos die apostel Paulus dit stel, het God weer gepraat – hierdie keer in die persoon van Jesus die Messias, die Seun van God, wie se geboorte, lewe, dood en opstanding alles verander het.

Die profete se eeue oue beloftes van ’n nuwe Dienskneg-Koning en koninkryk van God, die beloftes wat vir soveel jare verwag is, het nou op kragdadige maniere lewendig geword. Die mense kon God se genade, omgee, onuitputlike liefde en toewyding tot die herstel van verlore verhoudings deur hierdie timmerman en reisende onderwyser, Jesus – die Messias wat sy mense kom bevry het – vergestalt. Al die wysheid en doelwitte van God het gesentreer om Jesus se sending op aarde. Hy was God se laaste woord. En dit is hoe dit gebeur het ...

22

The Birth of the King

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace [1](#) and truth.

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, [2](#)

for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me —
holy is his name.

His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

How did Mary, a virgin, become pregnant? She and Joseph were engaged but had not had sexual relations. No medical doctor could answer this question, but such was the mysterious nature of Mary's conception and Jesus' birth — a miraculous beginning ordained by God's power alone. Imagine Mary's problem explaining this incredible experience! She couldn't understand it herself, much less explain it to her friends and family.

In that day and time, an engagement was considered as strong a commitment as marriage although Joseph and Mary were not officially married. Although he probably wanted to believe Mary, Joseph was in a difficult situation. Engaged and committed to a woman whom his family and friends would now despise, Joseph decided it was best to break off the engagement ... until an unusual visitor changed his perspective.

Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news ³ that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Joseph and Mary decided to remain in Bethlehem after Jesus was born. Faithful to the Law of Moses, they had Jesus circumcised when he was eight days old. There the new family was greeted by two older saints, Simeon and Anna, to whom God gave the opportunity to see and recognize the Messiah before the end of their days. And these wouldn’t be the last individuals to discern the special nature of the child Jesus.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi ⁴ from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;

for out of you will come a ruler

who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

"A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more."

After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and

go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead."

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth.

Nothing more is known about the boy Jesus until he appears in Jerusalem at age 12. Most likely he learned carpentry skills as a youngster from Joseph and studied in the synagogue. His mind grew strong, along with his body and soul. While still a youth, his agile mind was ready to engage in discussion with synagogue leaders. One time Jesus became so engrossed in learning and questioning that he lost track of time.

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

"Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Who was this Jesus? A new prophet? A scholar destined to be a great rabbi? Perhaps a political leader with the charisma to finally

send the oppressive Roman armies, who controlled Judea, back across the sea? None of these expectations turned out to describe him adequately. In fact, Jesus defied expectations as the people watched and wondered.

Jesus

*This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah,
the son of David,
the son of Abraham:*

Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

Judah the father of Perez and Zerah,

whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon,

whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

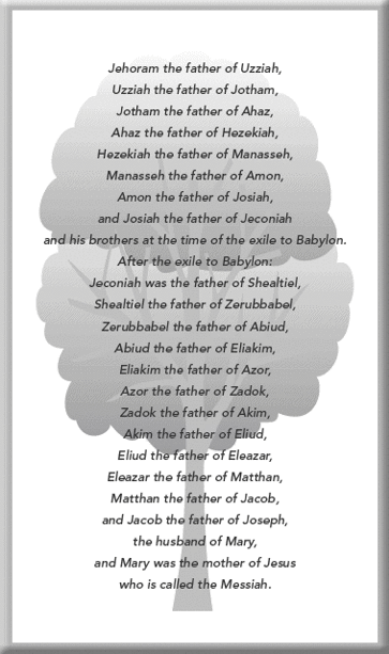
Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,



Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,
and Josiah the father of Jeconiah
and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon:
Jecooniah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,
Abiud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Eliud,
Eliud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Joseph,
the husband of Mary,
and Mary was the mother of Jesus
who is called the Messiah.

1Grace: Unmerited favor and blessing. In the New Testament, this term often refers to the undeserved pardon from sin through Jesus' death.

2Savior: One who rescues or heals. Jesus Christ is revealed as the Savior who rescues his people from sin and eternal punishment.

3Good news: The literal translation of the word *gospel*, this word refers to the message that Jesus has come to reconcile humanity to God. The good news is that each individual can accept this undeserved gift and enter into a relationship with him.

4Magi: Traditionally *wise men*.

Die geboorte van die Koning

Heel aan die begin het die Woord reeds bestaan. Die Woord was by God, en die Woord was self God. Hy was reeds in die begin by God. Alles het deur Hom ontstaan, en sonder Hom het nie een ding wat bestaan, ontstaan nie. In Hom was daar lewe, en dié lewe het gedien as die lig vir die mense. Die lig skyn in die duisternis, ja – die duisternis het dit nie uitgedoof nie!

Daar was 'n man, gestuur deur God, met die naam Johannes. Hy het gekom met die doel om 'n getuienis te lewer, om van die lig te getuig sodat alle mense op grond van sy getuienis sou glo. Hy was nie self die lig nie, maar het net kom getuig oor die lig.

Hy wat die betroubare lig is, wat elke mens verlig, was op pad na die mensewêreld. Maar toe Hy wel in die wêreld was – dié wêreld wat deur Hom ontstaan het – het die mensdom Hom tog nie erken nie.

Hy het na sy eiendom toe gekom, en tog het sy eie mense Hom nie aanvaar nie. Aan almal wat Hom egter aanvaar het, dié wat in sy Naam glo, het Hy die reg gegee om kinders van God te word. Hulle is nie deur 'n natuurlike proses gebore nie, en ook nie na aanleiding van die wilsbesluit van 'n man nie. Hulle is uit God gebore.



En die Woord het mens geword en by ons kom woon. Ons het sy heerlikheid duidelik gesien, 'n heerlikheid soos dié van die enigste Seun van die Vader, vol liefdevolle goedheid en waarheid.

Die wet is deur middel van Moses gegee; die genade en waarheid het deur Jesus Christus gekom. Niemand het God nog ooit gesien nie. Sy enigste Seun wat self ook God en baie na aan die Vader is, het Hom aan ons kom bekendmaak.

God het die engel Gabriël na Nasaret, 'n dorp in Galilea, gestuur na 'n jong meisie met die naam Maria. Sy was verloof aan 'n man met die

naam Josef, 'n afstammeling van koning Dawid. Gabriël het aan haar verskyn en gesê: “Ek groet jou, geseënde vrou! Die Here is met jou!”

Verward en ontsteld het Maria gewonder wat die engel se begroeting kon beteken. “Moenie bang wees nie, Maria,” het die engel gesê, “want God het besluit om jou te seën! Jy sal swanger word en 'n seun hê en jy moet Hom Jesus noem. Hy sal groot wees en die Seun van die Allerhoogste genoem word. En die Here God sal Hom die troon van sy voorvader Dawid gee. Hy sal vir ewig oor Israel regeer; en sy koningsheerskappy sal nooit eindig nie!”

Maria het vir die engel gevra: “Maar hoe kan ek 'n kind hê? Ek was nog nooit by 'n man nie.”

Die engel het geantwoord: “Die Heilige Gees sal oor jou kom en die krag van die Allerhoogste sal jou toevou. Daarom sal die kind wat gebore word, heilig en die Seun van God genoem word.”

Maria het geantwoord: “Ek is die Here se dienaar en gewillig om te aanvaar wat Hy ook al wil hê. Mag alles wat jy gesê het, waar word.” Toe het die engel weggegaan.

Maria het geantwoord:

“Ek prys die Here.

Ek juig in God my Verlosser!

Want Hy het omgesien

na sy nederige diensmeisie,

en nou sal geslag na geslag my geseënd noem.

Want Hy, die magtige Een,

het groot dinge vir my gedoen.

Heilig is sy Naam!

Sy ontferming strek van geslag tot geslag

oor almal wat Hom eer.

Sy kragtige arm doen geweldige dinge!

Hy verstrooi die trotse en hooghartige mense!

Hy het prinse onttroon

en nederiges verhef.

Hy het dié wat gebrek ly,

met goeie dinge versadig,

en die rykes met leë hande weggestuur.

Hy het sy dienaar Israel gehelp!

Hy het nie sy belofte vergeet

om ontferming te bewys nie.

Want Hy het ons voorvaders belof
– vir Abraham en sy kinders –
om vir altyd goed te wees teenoor hulle.”

Hoe het Maria, ’n maagd, swanger geword? Sy en Josef was verloof, maar het nie ’n seksuele verhouding gehad nie. Geen mediese dokter kon hierdie vraag beantwoord nie, maar dit was die misterie van Maria se bevrugting en Jesus se geboorte – ’n wonderbaarlike begin georden deur God se krag alleen. Stel jou Maria se probleem voor wanneer sy hierdie ongelooflike ervaring moet verduidelik. Sy kon dit self nie verstaan nie, wat nog te sê aan haar familie en vriende verduidelik.

Josef en Maria was nie amptelik getroud nie, maar in daardie tyd is ’n verlowing as net so bindend beskou as ’n huwelik. Alhoewel hy dalk vir Maria wou glo, was Josef in ’n moeilike posisie. Omdat hy verloof en verbind was aan ’n vrou wat sy familie en vriende nou sou verag, het Josef besluit die beste sou wees om die verlowing te verbreek ... totdat ’n ongewone besoeker sy perspektief verander het.

Josef, haar verloofde, was in ’n dilemma. Aan die een kant was hy ’n wetsgehoorsame man; aan die ander kant wou hy haar die openbare skande spaar. Daarom het hy hom voorgeneem om die verlowing privaat te verbreek.

Met hierdie dinge in gedagte het hy aan die slaap geraak. Daarop verskyn ’n engel van die Here in ’n droom aan hom en sê: “Moenie huiwer om voort te gaan met jou huwelik met Maria nie. Die Kindjie wat sy dra, is verwek deur die Heilige Gees. Sy sal aan ’n Seun geboorte gee, en jy moet Hom Jesus noem, want Hy sal sy volk van hulle sondes red.”

Dit alles het gebeur om die Here se boodskap deur die profeet te laat uitkom: “Die maagd sal swanger word! Sy sal aan ’n Seun geboorte gee. En die mense sal Hom Immanuel noem.” (Hierdie naam beteken: God is by ons.)

Toe Josef wakker word, het hy gemaak soos die engel van die Here hom beveel het. Hy het Maria as sy vrou by hom in die huis geneem.

Gedurende daardie tyd het die Romeinse keiser Augustus ’n bevel uitgevaardig dat ’n sensus deur die hele Romeinse Ryk gehou moes word. Dit was die eerste sensus wat gehou is toe Sirenus goewerneur van Sirië was. Almal het teruggegaan na hulle eie dorpe om vir die sensus te registreer.

En omdat Josef 'n afstammeling van koning Dawid was, moes hy vanaf die dorp Nasaret in Galilea na Judea gaan, na Betlehem, Dawid se tuisdorp. Hy het sy verloofde, Maria, wat swanger was, saamgeneem om te gaan registreer. Terwyl hulle daar was, het die tyd aangebreek dat haar kind gebore moes word. Sy het geboorte gegee aan haar eerste Kind, 'n seun. Sy het Hom in doeke toegedraai en Hom in 'n krip neergelê omdat daar vir hulle geen plek in die herberg was nie.

Daardie nag was daar skaapwagters wat in die veld buite die dorpie hulle skape opgepas het. Skielik het 'n engel van die Here aan hulle verskyn en die glans van die Here het om hulle geskyn. Hulle het vreeslik bang geword, maar die engel het hulle gerusgestel: “Moenie bang wees nie!” het hy gesê. “Ek bring vir julle goeie nuus wat groot blydschap vir almal inhou! Die Verlosser – ja, die Messias, die Here – is vannag in Betlehem, die tuisdorp van Dawid, gebore! En dit is hoe julle Hom sal herken: Julle sal 'n Kindjie vind wat in 'n krip lê en in doeke toegedraai is!”

Skielik was daar saam met die engel 'n groot menigte ander engele, 'n leërskaer uit die hemel, wat God prys:

“Eer aan God in die hoogste hemel,
en vrede op aarde vir almal in wie Hy 'n welbehag het.”

Toe die engele teruggegaan het na die hemel, sê die skaapwagters vir mekaar: “Kom ons gaan Betlehem toe om te sien watter wonderlike ding gebeur het, soos die Here dit aan ons bekendgemaak het.”

Hulle het toe na die dorp toe gehardloop en vir Maria en Josef gekry, en die Kindjie wat in die krip lê. Toe het die skaapwagters vir almal gaan vertel wat gebeur het, en wat die engel vir hulle oor die Kindjie gesê het. Almal wat die skaapwagters se verhaal gehoor het, was verbaas, maar Maria het stilweg hierdie dinge in haar hart bewaar en dikwels daaroor nagedink.

Die skaapwagters het teruggegaan na die veld en hulle kuddes terwyl hulle God loof en prys oor wat die engele vir hulle vertel het, en omdat hulle die Kind gesien het, net soos die engel gesê het.

Josef en Maria het besluit om ná Jesus se geboorte in Betlehem te bly. Getrou aan die wet van Moses, het hulle Jesus laat besny toe Hy agt dae oud was en Hom in die tempel aan die Here toegewy. Daar het hulle Simeon en Anna ontmoet, aan wie God die geleentheid gegee het om die Messias te sien en te herken voor hulle laaste dae. En hulle sou

nie die laastes wees om te sien hoe spesiaal dié Kind is nie.

Jesus is in die dorp Betlehem in Judea gebore tydens die regeringstyd van koning Herodes die Grote. Omstreeks daardie tyd het daar sterrekundiges uit die ooste in Jerusalem opgedaag. Hulle doen toe navraag: “Waar is die pasgebore Koning van die Jode? Ons het sy ster sien verskyn en gekom om Hom te aanbid.”

Toe koning Herodes hiervan hoor, het dit hom hewig ontstel; so ook die hele Jerusalem. Hy roep toe al die priesterhoofde en skrifkeners bymekaar en hoor by hulle waar die Messias gebore sou word. Hulle het hom geantwoord: “In Betlehem in Judea, want die profeet het soos volg geskryf:

“En jy, Betlehem, in die landstreek van Juda,
jy is beslis nie die onbeduidendste dorpie in Juda nie;
want uit jou sal daar ’n leier voortkom
wat my volk Israel sal versorg
soos ’n skaapwagter sy skape.”

Daarop het Herodes ’n geheime boodskap na die sterrekundiges gestuur om hulle na hom te ontbied. Hy het toe noukeurig by hulle vasgestel wanneer die ster oorspronklik verskyn het. Daarna laat hy hulle na Betlehem gaan met die opdrag: “Gaan vind alles noukeurig oor die Kindjie uit. As julle Hom kry, kom sê vir my dat ek Hom ook kan gaan aanbid.”

Nadat hulle die koning aangehoor het, het die sterrekundiges vertrek. En, werklikwaar, die ster wat hulle in die ooste sien verskyn het, is weer daar en dit beweeg voor hulle uit totdat dit bokant die plek gaan staan waar die Kindjie was. Met dié dat hulle die ster sien, het ’n wonderlike blydskap oor hulle gekom. Toe hulle in die huis ingaan, sien hulle die Kindjie by Maria, sy ma, en hulle val voor Hom neer en aanbid Hom. Toe maak hulle hulle kissies met kosbaarhede oop en gee aan Hom geskenke van goud en wierook en mirre. Maar omdat God hulle in ’n droom gewaarsku het om nie weer na Herodes terug te gaan nie, het hulle met ’n ander roete huis toe vertrek.

Ná die vertrek van die sterrekundiges verskyn daar ’n engel van die Here in ’n droom aan Josef en sê: “Staan op en vlug met die Kindjie en sy ma na Egipte toe. Bly daar tot ek vir jou sê om terug te kom, want Herodes gaan die Kindjie probeer doodmaak.”

Josef het toe opgestaan en nog daardie selfde nag met die Kindjie en sy ma na Egipte toe vertrek. En hulle het daar gebly tot Herodes se

dood. So is vervul wat die Here deur die profeet gesê het: “Uit Egipte het Ek my Seun geroep.”

Toe Herodes agterkom dat die sterrekundiges hom uitoorlê het, was hy siedend van woede. Hy het soldate gestuur om in en rondom Betlehem al die seuntjies van twee jaar en jonger om die lewe te bring. Hy het die twee jaar bereken volgens die tyd wat hy by die sterrekundiges vasgestel het. Daarmee is Jeremia se uitspraak vervul:

“’n Smartkreet word gehoor in Rama,
’n gesnik en ’n bitter geklaag.
Ragel huil oor haar kinders.
Sy wil maar net nie vertroos word nie,
want hulle is dood.”

Ná Herodes se dood verskyn daar ’n engel van die Here in ’n droom aan Josef en sê vir hom: “Staan op en neem die Kindjie en sy ma terug na die land Israel, want die mense wat die Kindjie om die lewe wou bring, is dood.”

Josef het dadelik met die Kindjie en sy ma vertrek en hy het in die land Israel aangekom. Toe hy egter hoor dat Argelaus koning geword het in sy pa, Herodes, se plek, het hy bang geword om na Judea te reis. Omdat God hom in ’n droom so beveel het, het hy toe na die omgewing van Galilea vertrek. En so het hy hom gaan vestig in ’n dorp met die naam Nasaret. Daarmee is die uitspraak van die profete vervul dat die Messias ’n Nasarener genoem sou word.

Daar is niks meer bekend oor die seuntjie Jesus totdat Hy op twaalfjarige ouderdom in Jerusalem verskyn nie. Hy het waarskynlik van kleins af by Josef geleer hoe om ’n timmerman te wees en is by die sinagoge onderrig. Hy het gegroei en sterker en wyser geword. Alhoewel Hy nog jonk was, was Hy so vlug van verstand dat Hy gereed was om in gesprek te tree met die sinagoge-leiers. Eenkeer het Jesus so verdiep geraak in hierdie onderrig dat Hy tred verloor het met die tyd.

Elke jaar het Jesus se ouers Jerusalem toe gegaan vir die Paasfees. Toe Jesus twaalf jaar oud was, het hulle soos gewoonlik die fees bygewoon. Ná die feesviering het hulle na Nasaret vertrek, maar Jesus het in Jerusalem agtergebly sonder dat sy ouers daarvan geweet het. Sy ouers het Hom eers nie vermis nie omdat hulle gedink het Hy was by ander vriende in die reisgeselskap. Maar toe Hy die aand nog nie sy

opwagting gemaak het nie, het hulle by familie en vriende na Hom begin soek. Toe hulle Hom nie kon kry nie, is hulle terug na Jerusalem om daar na Hom te soek.

Drie dae later het hulle Hom uiteindelik gekry. Hy het in die tempel tussen die leermeesters gesit terwyl Hy na hulle luister en hulle uitvra. Almal wat na Hom geluister het, was verbaas oor sy insig en antwoorde.

Toe sy ouers Hom sien, het hulle nie geweet wat om daarvan te dink nie. “Kind,” het sy ma vir Hom gesê, “waarom het jy so met ons gemaak? Ek en jou pa het rasend van bekommernis na jou gesoek!”

“Maar hoekom was dit nodig om te soek?” het Hy gevra. “Julle moes geweet het Ek sou in my Vader se huis wees.” Maar hulle het nie verstaan wat Hy bedoel nie.

Hy is toe saam met hulle terug na Nasaret en was gehoorsaam aan hulle. Sy ma het al hierdie dinge in haar hart bewaar. En so het Jesus grootgeword en in wysheid toegeneem; Hy was geliefd by God en almal wat Hom geken het.

Wie was hierdie Jesus? 'n Nuwe profeet? 'n Student wat eendag 'n groot rabbi sou wees? Miskien 'n politieke leier met die charisma om die onderdrukkende Romeinse weermag, wat Judea beheer het, uiteindelik terug oor die see te stuur? Nie een van hierdie verwagtings het Hom op die ou end werklik akkuraat beskryf nie. Om die waarheid te sê, het Jesus bo enige verwagtings uitgestyg.

Jesus

Hier volg die familieregister van Jesus Christus.

Hy was die Seun van Dawid,
en uit die nageslag van Abraham.

Abraham was die pa van Isak,

Isak die pa van Jakob,

Jakob die pa van Juda en sy broers.

Juda was die pa van Peres en Serag by Tamar.

Peres was die pa van Gesron,

Gesron die pa van Ram,

Ram die pa van Amminadab,

Amminadab die pa van Nagson,

Nagson die pa van Salmon.

Salmon was die pa van Boas by Ragab,

Boas die pa van Obed by Rut,

Obed die pa van Isai,

Isai die pa van koning Dawid.

Dawid was die pa van Salomo

by die vrou van Urija,

Salomo die pa van Rehabeam,

Rehabeam die pa van Abia,

Abia die pa van Asa,

Asa die pa van Josafat,

Josafat die pa van Joram,

Joram die pa van Ussia,
Ussia die pa van Jotam,
Jotam die pa van Agas,
Agas die pa van Hiskia,
Hiskia die pa van Manasse,
Manasse die pa van Amon,
Amon die pa van Josia,
Josia die pa van Jojagin en sy broers.

Teen hierdie tyd het die Babiloniese ballingskap begin.

Tydens die Babiloniese ballingskap het
Jojagin die pa geword van Sealtiel.

Sealtiel was die pa van Serubbabel,

Serubbabel die pa van Abihud,

Abihud die pa van Eljakim,

Eljakim die pa van Asor,

Asor die pa van Sadok,

Sadok die pa van Agim,

Agim die pa van Elihud,

Elihud die pa van Eleasar,

Eleasar die pa van Mattan,

Mattan die pa van Jakob.

Jakob was die pa van Josef,

die man van Maria.

Sy was die ma van Jesus,
wat die Messias genoem word.

23

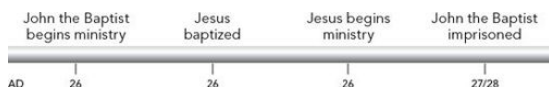
Jesus' Ministry Begins

Imagine if you were introducing the Savior of the world. Wouldn't you make it a gala event? Call in the media? Spotlight the attending celebs? Give the Savior the red-carpet treatment? Get people's attention?

God doesn't work that way. He planned his Son's introduction using a scruffy bohemian prophet called John the Baptist. John, the son of Mary's relative Elizabeth, was the one who had been foretold to precede the Messiah "in the spirit and power of Elijah." John was unique among the prophets. He lived outside of the mainstream religious culture, yet his message was more timely than any other.

IN THOSE DAYS John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized [1](#) by him in the Jordan River.



Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell

these stones to become bread.”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you,

and they will lift you up in their hands,

so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Following the test in the wilderness, Jesus began his public ministry. John the Baptist continued to point to Jesus, claiming that everything God had promised centered on this one man. This was startling news to the religious elite, and John was asked to explain himself. Imagine skilled religious lawyers questioning this rough-hewn eccentric, a man without credentials or authorization. The interrogation began.

Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.”

They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

Now the Pharisees ² who had been sent questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

“I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, ³ who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, ‘A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.”

Then John gave this testimony: “I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ⁴ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!”

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”

“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter). ⁵

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked.

“Come and see,” said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.”

“How do you know me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, “I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”

Jesus said, “You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.” He then added, “Very truly I tell you, you will see ‘heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on’ the Son of Man.” ⁶

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to

the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Jesus began to reveal who he was, and he was like no other person anyone had known. Although he was fully human, he was also fully God. With his 12 disciples as interns, Jesus began his itinerant ministry of teaching and healing.

Soon he traveled to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. It was in Jerusalem that political and religious decisions were made; power brokers set their agendas in this bustling town. Many people listened to Jesus' teachings and believed he was the Messiah. Others thought he was a troublemaker. One inquisitive religious leader sought Jesus out privately, under cover of darkness. Jesus took the opportunity to summarize his mission by talking about being born ... again.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a

member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” ⁷

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven — the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

The kind of claims Jesus made did not make him very popular with the religious elite. But Jesus knew his purpose, and he spent much of his time with ordinary people who had ordinary human needs. One

such person was a woman he met in the region of Samaria. Women were second-class citizens in the culture of that day. In addition, there was a harsh rivalry between Jews and Samaritans, and most Jews would not associate in any way with Samaritans, let alone a woman. But once again, Jesus broke the mold.

Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you

now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you — I am he.”

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

After the two days he left for Galilee.

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are — the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching — and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else — to the nearby villages — so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man.

"I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors

and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

From the start, Jesus appeared to be a different kind of rabbi. He seemed to disregard the many customary laws that defined proper behavior for Jewish people. He put people before laws. His “new way” was forgiving and kind. Jesus didn’t come off as a rabble-rouser but as a friend to people on the outside, people suspected of not being pure, people most religious leaders disliked.

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”

Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians [8](#) how they might kill Jesus.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him. Whenever the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." But he gave them strict orders not to tell others about him.

The Jews were convinced that when the long-awaited Messiah came, he would free the people from political oppression. He would liberate them from the power of the Roman Empire. They were looking for an earthly king to bring their nation into power. But Jesus' purpose was much deeper, his intentions more significant, and his kingship infinitely more glorious than what the people were expecting. They had to learn the true meaning of the word "Messiah"—Anointed One. They had to discover who Jesus really was. Only then would they have his okay to spread the Good News.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder"), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Apparently even John the Baptist didn't really understand who Jesus was. John had announced Jesus as the coming Messiah, but Jesus' work hadn't brought the results John evidently expected. Added to John's disappointment was the fact that he had been languishing in

prison for some time because he had publicly criticized Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas was one of the sons of Herod the Great, who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth. Herod Antipas was the Roman puppet ruler over Galilee, and he had convinced his brother's wife to leave her husband and marry him, a violation of Jewish law. John had been locked up for pointing out Herod's sin.

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written:

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way before you.'

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come."

Jesus' answer to John gave more insight into Jesus' role as Savior and the Messiah. Many people were intrigued by this prophet and teacher, and they wanted to hear more.

1Baptized, baptism: A symbolic act demonstrating that new

believers have abandoned their former ways and have embarked on new life.

2Pharisees: The most powerful group of religious authorities within Judaism. The Pharisees were highly focused on their interpretation of the laws given by God, and they often challenged Jesus regarding these precepts.

3Lamb of God: One of the names of Jesus, which demonstrates the connection between Jesus' sacrificial death and the offerings of the Old Testament.

4Disciples: The followers of Jesus.

5Peter: *Cephas* (Aramaic) and *Peter* (Greek) both mean "rock."

6Son of Man: A name of Jesus that emphasizes his dual nature as both fully God and fully human.

7Born again: A term signifying the new spiritual life gained when one believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and accepts his death on the cross as a "free gift" that releases people from the penalty of sin.

8Herodians: A Jewish sect.

23

Jesus se bediening begin

Stel jou voor jy moet die Redder van die wêreld voorstel. Sal jy 'n galageleentheid reël? Die media bel? 'n Kollig op die bekendes gooi? Vir die Redder soos 'n superster handel? Mense se aandag kry?

God werk nie so nie. Sy plan was om sy Seun bekend te stel deur 'n verslonste, boheemse profeet met die naam Johannes die Doper. Johannes, die seun van Maria se familielid Elisabet, was die een waarvan daar gesê is dat hy die Messias sou vooruitgaan "in die gees en krag van Elia". Johannes was uniek onder die profete. Hy het buite

die algemene godsdienstige kultuur geleef, tog was sy boodskap meer tydig as enige ander.

Op 'n dag verskyn Johannes die Doper in die woestyn van Judea en kondig God se boodskap aan deur te sê: “Kom tot inkeer! God se koningsheerskappy gaan nou enige oomblik begin!”



Hierdie Johannes het klere van kameelhaar gedra, met 'n leerbelt om sy middel. Hy het van sprinkane en veldheuning gelewe. Kort voor lank begin daar toe mense uit Jerusalem en uit die hele Judea en Jordaanomgewing na hom toe stroom. En nadat hulle hulle sondes bely het, het hy hulle in die Jordaanrivier gedoop.

Op 'n dag het Jesus van Galilea af by die Jordaanrivier aangekom om deur Johannes gedoop te word. Maar Johannes wou Hom keer. “Ú behoort my tog veel eerder te doop,” het hy gesê. “Dit is ongehoord dat U nou na my toe kom!”

Maar Jesus het hom geantwoord: “Wag nou! Ons moet God se wil juis op hierdie manier gehoorsaam.” Daarop het Johannes ingestem en Hom gedoop.

Ná Jesus se doop het Hy dadelik uit die water geklim. Net daar gaan die hemel toe vir Hom oop, en Hy sien hoe die Gees van God soos 'n duif op Hom afdaal. Daar kom toe 'n stem uit die hemel wat sê: “Hý is my geliefde Seun, 'n Kind so na my hart.”

Daarop het die Gees Jesus die woestyn in gelei om deur die duiwel versoek te word. Nadat Hy vir 40 dae en 40 nagte gevas het, het Hy naderhand baie honger begin word. Toe kom die versoeker na Hom toe en sê vir Hom: “As jy dan die Seun van God is, beveel hierdie klippe om brode te word.”

Maar Jesus het hom geantwoord: “Nee! Daar staan in die Skrif geskryf: “'n Mens het meer as brood nodig om van te lewe. Wat jy eintlik nodig het, is om te leef van elke woord uit God se mond.”

Daarna neem die duiwel Hom Jerusalem toe en laat Hom op die hoogste spits van die tempel staan. Toe sê hy vir Hom: “As jy regtig die Seun van God is, spring dan hier af. Daar staan mos in die Skrif geskryf:

“God sal aan sy engele opdrag gee om jou te beskerm.

En hulle sal jou op die hande dra
sodat jy nie dalk jou voet teen 'n klip stamp nie.”

Jesus het hom geantwoord: “Daar staan ook geskrywe: ‘Jy mag die Here jou God nie versoek nie. En Hom alleen moet jy dien.’”

Vervolgens neem die duiwel Hom na die top van 'n baie hoë berg en wys vir Hom al die koninkryke van die wêreld met hulle prag en praal. Daarop sê hy vir Jesus: “Dit alles sal ek vir jou gee. Al wat jy moet doen, is om neer te kniel en my te aanbid.”

Toe sê Jesus vir hom: “Trap, Satan! Daar staan in die Skrif: ‘Jy moet die Here jou God aanbid en Hom alleen dien.’”

Daarna het die duiwel die aftog geblaas. En daar het engele na Hom toe gekom en Hom versorg.

Ná die toets in die woestyn het Jesus met sy openbare bediening begin. Johannes die Doper het voortgegaan om die weg na Jesus te wys, en beweer dat alles wat God belowe het na hierdie een Man wys. Dit was verrassende nuus vir die godsdienstiges leiers, en Johannes is gevra om te verduidelik. Stel jou vaardige godsdienstige prokureurs voor wat hierdie eksentrieke man ondervra, 'n man sonder enige verwysings of volmag. Die ondervraging het begin.

Dit is die getuienis van Johannes toe die Joodse leiers uit Jerusalem priesters en Leviete na hom gestuur het om hom uit te vra: “Wie is jy nou eintlik?” Toe het Johannes getuig en dit nie ontken nie, maar voluit bely: “Ek is nie die Messias nie.”

En hulle antwoord hom toe: “Nou wie is jy dan? Is jy Elia?”

“Nee, ek is nie,” sê Johannes.

“Is jy dan die profeet?”

“Beslis nie!” het hy geantwoord.

Hulle het toe vir hom gesê: “Wie is jy dan? Ons moet 'n antwoord kan gee aan hulle wat ons gestuur het. Wat het jy dan oor jouself te sê?”

Sy reaksie was: “Ek is 'n stem wat roep in die woestyn: ‘Maak die pad van die Here reguit.’” Só het die profeet Jesaja mos reeds gesê.

Dié wat gestuur is, het uit die geledere van die Fariseërs gekom. Hulle het toe verder by hom navraag gedoen: “Waarom doop jy dan as jy nie die Messias of Elia of die profeet is nie?”

Johannes se reaksie was: “Ek doop met water, maar hier tussen julle staan daar Iemand wat julle nie nou ken nie. Dit is Hy wat ná my kom. Ek is nie eers werd om die riempies van sy sandale los te maak

nie.”

Hierdie gebeure het afgespeel in Betanië, oorkant die Jordaan, waar Johannes besig was om te doop.

Die volgende dag sien Johannes dat Jesus na hom toe aangestap kom. Hy sê toe: “Kyk, dáár is die Lam van God wat die sonde van die wêreld wegneem. Dit is Hy van wie ek gesê het: ‘Ná my kom iemand wat voor my reeds bestaan het. Hy is baie belangriker as ek.’ Ek was self ook nie daarvan bewus dat dit Hy is nie. Daarom het ek gekom, en doop ek met water om Hom aan Israel voor te stel.”

Johannes het ook nog verder getuig: “Ek het duidelik gesien dat die Gees soos ’n duif uit die hemel neerkom en op Hom gaan sit. Ek het regtig nie geweet dat dit Hy was nie, maar God wat my gestuur het om met water te doop, het vir my gesê: ‘Die Een op wie jy die Gees sien neerdaal en bly sit, dit is Hy wat met die Heilige Gees doop.’ Ek het dit self sien afspeel voor my oë, en daarom getuig ek dat Hy werklik die Seun van God is.”

Die volgende dag het Johannes weer daar gestaan, saam met twee van sy dissipels. Toe Jesus by hulle verbyloop, het Johannes betekenisvol na Hom gekyk en gesê: “Kyk, dáár is die Lam van God!”

Sy twee dissipels het Johannes dit hoor sê en Jesus dadelik begin volg. Jesus het omgedraai en gesien hulle volg Hom. Hy sê toe vir hulle: “Wat soek julle?”

Hulle het Hom geantwoord: “Rabbi” – as dit vertaal word, beteken dit ‘leermeester’ – “waar gaan U tuis?”

Hy antwoord hulle: “Kom kyk self en julle sal sien.”

Hulle het toe gegaan en gesien waar Hy tuis was. Dit was omtrent vieruur die middag. Hulle het toe die res van daardie dag by Hom gebly.

Andreas, Simon Petrus se broer, was een van die twee dissipels wat dit van Johannes gehoor en Jesus gevolg het. Hy kry toe eers sy eie broer Simon, en sê vir hom: “Ons het die Messias (wat as dit vertaal word ‘Gesalfde’ beteken) gekry.” Hy het Simon na Jesus toe geneem.

Jesus het betekenisvol na hom gekyk en gesê: “Jy is Simon, die seun van Johannes; jy sal van nou af Sefas (wat as ‘Petrus’ vertaal word) genoem word.”

Die volgende dag wou Jesus na Galilea toe vertrek. Hy loop eers vir Filippus raak en sê vir hom: “Volg My!”

Filippus het van Betsaida af gekom, Andreas en Petrus se tuisdorp. Op sy beurt loop Filippus vir Natanael raak en sê vir hom: “Ons het die persoon gevind oor wie Moses in die wet en die profete geskryf

het. Dit is Jesus, die seun van Josef, wat van Nasaret af kom.”

Natanael se reaksie was: “Hoe kan daar uit Nasaret iets goeds kom?”

“Kom kyk self,” het Filippus hom uitgenooi.

Toe Jesus Natanael sien aangestap kom, sê Hy oor hom: “Kyk daar – ’n opregte Israeliet, ’n man van suiwer inbors.”

Natanael reageer toe vraend: “Van waar ken U my?”

“Voordat Filippus jou geroep het,” antwoord Jesus hom, “toe jy nog onder die vyeboom gesit het, het Ek jou al gesien.”

Toe reageer Natanael: “Rabbi, U is die Seun van God; U is die Koning van Israel!”

Jesus se antwoord aan hom was: “Glo jy omdat Ek vir jou gesê het dat Ek jou onder die vyeboom sien sit het? Jy sal nog groter dinge as dit sien.” Jesus het ook vir hom gesê: “Ek verseker julle: julle gaan die hemel wyd oop sien en julle sal die engele van God sien op- en afklim na My, die Seun van die Mens, toe.”

Op die derde dag was daar ’n bruilof in Kana, in die Galilea-gebied. Jesus se ma het dit bygewoon en Hy en sy dissipels was ook na die bruilof toe genooi. Toe die wyn opraak, sê Jesus se ma vir Hom: “Hulle het nie meer wyn nie.”

Jesus se reaksie was: “Wat het dit met My en jou te doen, Vrou? My tyd het nog nie gekom nie.”

Sy ma sê toe vir die kelners: “Wat Hy ook al vir julle sê, moet julle gaan doen.”

Daar het ses klipkanne gestaan met water wat die Jode vir hulle rituele reiniging gebruik het. Elkeen het ongeveer 100 liter gehou.

Jesus sê toe vir die kelners: “Maak die kanne vol water!” Hulle het dit tot heel bo volgemaak.

Toe sê Jesus ook nog vir hulle: “Skep nou daarvan uit en vat dit vir die seremoniemeester.”

Hulle het dit gedoen. Toe die seremoniemeester die water proe wat wyn geword het, roep hy die bruidegom. (Die seremoniemeester het nie geweet waar dit vandaan kom nie, maar die kelners wat die water geskep het, het wel geweet.) Die seremoniemeester sê toe vir die bruidegom: “Elke gasheer sit volgens gebruik eers die goeie wyn voor, en wanneer die gaste nie meer so goed kan onderskei nie, die swakker gehalte; jy het egter die goeie wyn tot nou toe teruggehou.”

Hierdie eerste wonderteken het Jesus in Kana, in Galilea, gedoen. Hy het sy Goddelike heerlikheid op só ’n manier sigbaar gemaak, en sy dissipels het in Hom begin glo.

Jesus het begin wys wie Hy is, en Hy was soos geen ander mens wat enigiemand geken het nie. Alhoewel Hy volkome mens was, was Hy ook volkome God. Met sy twaalf dissipels as vakleerlinge het Jesus met sy reisende bediening van lering en genesing begin.

Baie gou het Hy na die stad Jerusalem gereis om die Paasfees te gaan vier. Dit is in Jerusalem waar politieke en godsdienstige besluite geneem is; waar mense in magtige posisies hulle agendas opgestel het. Baie mense het na Jesus se leringe geluister en geglo dat Hy die Messias is. Ander het gedink Hy is 'n moeilikheidmaker. Een nuuskierige godsdienstige leier het Jesus in die geheim besoek, in die donker. Jesus het van die geleentheid gebruik gemaak om sy sending op te som deur te praat oor die weergeboorte.

Daar was 'n man uit die geleedere van die Fariseërs met die naam Nikodemus, 'n leier onder die Jode. Hy het een nag na Jesus toe gekom en vir Hom gesê: “Rabbi, ons weet dat u as leraar van God af gekom het. Niemand kan hierdie wondertekens doen wat u doen as God nie met hom is nie.”

Jesus het daarop reageer: “Ek verseker jou, as iemand nie van bo gebore word nie, kan hy die koninkryk van God nie sien nie.”

Nikodemus vra toe: “Hoe kan 'n mens gebore word as hy al 'n bejaarde is? Hy kan tog nie vir 'n tweede keer in sy ma se skoot gaan en gebore word nie?”

Jesus het geantwoord: “Ek verseker jou, as iemand nie uit water en Gees gebore word nie, kan hy so nimmer as te nooit in die koninkryk van God ingaan nie. Wat uit 'n menslike liggaam gebore is, is menslik, en wat uit die Gees gebore is, is gees. Moenie verwonderd wees dat Ek vir jou gesê het julle moet van bo gebore word nie. Die wind waai waar hy wil. Jy hoor sy suising, maar jy weet nie waarvandaan hy kom en waarheen hy op pad is nie. Só is dit met elkeen wat uit die Gees gebore is.”

Nikodemus reageer toe en vra Hom: “Hoe is dit moontlik dat hierdie dinge gebeur?”

Jesus antwoord hom: “Jy is die leermeester van Israel en jy is nie vertrouwd met hierdie dinge nie? Ek verseker jou, ons praat waaroor ons kennis het, en ons getuig oor wat ons gesien het, en ten spyte daarvan aanvaar julle tog nie ons getuienis nie. As Ek julle oor die alledaagse dinge ingelig het, en julle My nie glo nie, hoe sal julle ooit glo as Ek julle van die hemelse dinge vertel? Niemand het nog na die hemel toe opgevaar nie behalwe Hy wat uit die hemel neergedaal het, en dit is Ek, die Seun van die Mens. Net soos Moses die slang in die

woestyn verhoog het, só moet die Seun van die Mens verhoog word sodat elkeen wat in Hom glo die ewige lewe kan hê.

“God het die mensdom só liefgehad dat Hy sy enigste Seun gegee het sodat elkeen wat in Hom glo, nie verlore gaan nie, maar die ewige lewe sal hê. God het immers nie die Seun na die mensewêreld toe gestuur om die mense te veroordeel nie, maar sodat die mense deur Hom verlos kan word. Die persoon wat aanhou glo in Hom, word nie veroordeel nie. Die een wat egter nie aanhou glo nie, is reeds veroordeel omdat hy nie tot geloof gekom het in die enigste Seun van God nie.”

Die tipe dinge wat Jesus beweer het, het Hom nie baie gewild gemaak onder die godsdienstige leiers nie. Maar Jesus het geweet wat sy doel is en het baie van sy tyd saam met gewone mense met gewone menslike behoeftes deurgebring. Een so 'n persoon was 'n vrou wat Hy in die streek van Samaria ontmoet het. In daardie tyd was vroue tweedeklas-burgers. Verder was daar 'n hewige stryd tussen die Jode en Samaritane, en die meeste Jode sou glad nie op enige manier met Samaritane gesosialiseer het nie, wat nog te sê 'n vrou. Maar Jesus het weereens met tradisie gebreek.

Hy moes deur Samaria reis. Hy kom toe in 'n dorp in Samaria wat Sigar genoem word. Dit was naby die stuk grond wat Jakob aan sy seun Josef gegee het. Die put van Jakob was daar geleë. Jesus het toe, omdat Hy regtig uitgeput was van die reis, sommer by die put gaan sit. Dit was omtrent twaalfuur die middag.

'n Samaritaanse vrou kom toe daar aan om water te skep. Jesus vra haar: “Gee vir My asseblief water om te drink.” Sy dissipels was toe nog in die dorp om kos te gaan koop.

Die Samaritaanse vrou sê toe vir Hom: “Hoe op aarde vra jy wat 'n Jood is, van my wat 'n Samaritaanse vrou is, water om te drink?” Jode wou immers niks met Samaritane te doen hê nie.

Jesus het daarop reageer: “As jy maar net hierdie gawe van God vir jou geken het, en geweet het wie dit is wat vir jou vra: ‘Gee vir My water om te drink,’ sou jy Hóm gevra het en Hy sou vir jou lewende water gegee het.”

Die vrou sê vir Jesus: “Meneer, jy het nie eers 'n skepding nie, en die put is diép. Van waar kry jy dié lewende water? Jy is beslis nie belangriker as ons vader Jakob wat hierdie put vir ons gegee het en self saam met sy seuns en sy diere daaruit gedrink het nie.”

Jesus antwoord haar: “Elkeen wat van hierdie water drink, sal weer

dors word. Wie egter van die water drink wat Ek hom gee, sal nimmer as te nooit weer dors word nie. Die water wat Ek vir hom sal gee, sal 'n fontein in hom word waarvan die water vir altyd sal bly opborrel.”

Die vrou sê toe vir Hom: “Meneer, gee my van hierdie water sodat ek nie weer dors word en hierheen hoef te kom om water te skep nie.”

Hy sê vir haar: “Gaan roep jou man en kom dan terug hiernatoe.”

Die vrou het dadelik reageer: “Ek het nie 'n man nie.”

Jesus beaam dit toe: “Jy het tereg gesê: ‘Ek het nie 'n man nie.’ Want jy het reeds vyf mans gehad en die een wat jy nou het, is eintlik nie jou man nie. Dit wat jy gesê het, is die waarheid.”

Die vrou sê vir Hom: “Meneer, ek sien dat u 'n profeet is. Ons voorouers het op hierdie berg aanbid, maar julle sê die plek waar 'n mens moet aanbid, is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus merk toe op: “Glo My, Vrou, daar kom 'n tyd wanneer julle die Vader nie op hierdie berg en ook nie in Jerusalem sal aanbid nie. Julle aanbid wat julle nie ken nie; ons aanbid wat ons ken, want die verlossing is uit die geledere van die Jode. Daar kom egter 'n tyd, en dit het reeds aangebreek, wanneer die egte aanbidders die Vader vanuit 'n hegte verhouding met die Gees en in waarheid sal aanbid, want die Vader verkies dat die mense Hom só aanbid. God is Gees, en dié wat Hom aanbid, moet Hom vanuit 'n hegte verhouding met die Gees en in waarheid aanbid.”

Die vrou sê vir Jesus: “Ek weet dat die Messias kom, Hy wat die Christus genoem word. Wanneer Hy ook al kom, sal Hy ons oor alles inlig.”

Toe sê Jesus vir haar: “Ék is hy – Ek wat nou met jou praat!”

Op daardie oomblik het sy dissipels teruggekom. Hulle was verstom dat Jesus besig was om met 'n vrou te praat. Nietemin het niemand haar gevra: “Wat wil jy nou eintlik hê?” of vir Hom: “Waarom knoop U 'n gesprek met haar aan?” nie.

Die vrou het haar waterkruik net daar gelos, na die dorp toe gegaan en vir die mense gesê: “Kom kyk self – 'n man het my alles vertel wat ek al gedoen het. Is hy nie dalk die Messias nie?” Die inwoners het toe van die dorp af na Jesus toe begin stroom.

Uit daardie dorp het baie van die Samaritane in Jesus begin glo op grond van die woorde van die vrou wat met oortuiging kom vertel het: “Hy het my alles vertel wat ek gedoen het.” Toe die Samaritane by Jesus aankom, het hulle Hom gevra om by hulle tuis te gaan. En Hy het twee dae lank daar oorgebly. Baie meer van hulle eie mense het op grond van sy woorde begin glo.

Hulle het vir die vrou gesê: “Ons glo nie net meer op grond van wat jy gesê het nie; ons het nou self gehoor wat Hy sê, en ons weet dat Hy regtig die Verlosser van die wêreld is.”

Na twee dae het Jesus daarvandaan na Galilea toe vertrek.

Jesus en sy dissipels het in Kapernaum aangekom. Op die Sabbatdag het Hy dadelik na die sinagoge toe gegaan en Hy was besig om daar onderrig te gee. Hulle was verbaas oor sy onderrig, want Hy het onderrig gegee soos iemand met ware gesag – heeltemal anders as die skrifkenners. Skielik was daar in hulle sinagoge ’n man met ’n onrein gees wat begin uitroep: “Los ons uit, Jesus van Nasaret! Het jy gekom om ons te vernietig? Ek ken jou – jy is die Heilige van God!”

Maar Jesus het hom bestraf en beveel: “Bly stil, en gaan uit hom uit!” Daarop het die onrein gees hom stuiptrekkings laat kry, hard geskreeu en uit hom uitgegaan.

Hulle was almal verstom en het mekaar opgewonde begin uitvra: “Wat gaan hier aan? Watter nuwe soort lering is dit hierdie? Dit het soveel gesag! Selfs onrein geeste luister na sy opdragte!” Die nuus oor wat Jesus gedoen het, het dadelik deur die hele omgewing van Galilea versprei.

Nadat Jesus en sy dissipels uit die sinagoge gekom het, het hulle dadelik na die huis van Simon en Andreas gegaan. Jakobus en Johannes was ook by hulle. Simon se skoonma was siek in die bed vanweë ’n hoë koors. Hulle het dadelik vir Jesus van haar vertel. Hy het toe na haar bed toe gegaan, haar hand gevat en haar opgehelp. Die koors was weg en sy het vir hulle ’n ete voorberei.

Teen sononder daardie aand is baie siekes en mense wat onder die mag van bose geeste was, na Hom gebring. Die hele Kapernaum het by die deur saamgedrom om alles te sien. Jesus het baie siekes met allerlei kwale gesond gemaak en baie duiwels uit die mense gedryf, maar omdat hulle geweet het wie Hy is, het Hy hulle die swye opgelê.

Nog voor dagbreek die volgende oggend het Jesus opgestaan en alleen op ’n stil plek gaan bid. Later het Simon en die ander mense by hom agter Jesus aangegaan en toe hulle Hom kry, sê hulle vir Hom: “Almal vra na U.”

Jesus het egter geantwoord: “Ons moet ook nog verder gaan na die omliggende dorpe sodat Ek ook daar kan preek. Dit is immers waarvoor Ek gekom het.” So het Hy dan deur die hele Galilea in hulle sinagoges gepreek en bose geeste uitgedryf.

’n Man met ’n ernstige velsiekte het na Hom toe gekom, voor Hom gekniel en Hom gesmeek met die woorde: “As U wil, kan U my gesond

maak.”

Jesus het hom innig jammer gekry, sy hand uitgesteek en hom aangeraak met die woorde: “Ek wil dit vir jou doen. Word gesond!” Net daar het die ernstige velsiekte verdwyn – die man was gesond.

Jesus het hom toe dadelik weggestuur nadat Hy hom ernstig aangespreek het met die woorde: “Sorg dat jy met niemand langs die pad praat nie. Gaan reguit na die priester. Laat hy jou ondersoek. En bring die offer wat die wet van Moses vereis vir ernstige velsiektes wat genees is. So sal almal ’n duidelike bewys hê van jou genesing.”

Maar die man het weggegaan en die nuus van wat met hom gebeur het, oral versprei. Gevolglik het soveel mense Jesus begin omring dat dit vir Hom onmoontlik geword het om openlik in enige dorp in te gaan. Hy moes buite in afgeleë plekke bly. Tog het mense steeds van oral na Hom toe gekom.

Toe Jesus ná ’n hele aantal dae na Kapernaum terugkeer, het dit rugbaar geword dat Hy weer by die huis is. Gou-gou was die huis so vol mense dat daar vir niemand meer plek was nie, selfs nie voor die deur nie. Jesus was besig om die Goeie Nuus aan hulle te vertel. Daar daag toe vier mans by Hom op wat ’n verlamde persoon op ’n mat dra. As gevolg van die baie mense kon hulle hom nie tot by Jesus bring nie. Daarom het hulle ’n gat deur die dak bokant Jesus se kop gemaak. Toe laat hulle die mat waarop die sieke gelê het, deur die dak sak. Toe Jesus hulle geloof sien, sê Hy vir die verlamde man: “My seun, jou sondes word vergewe.”

Maar party van die skrifkenners wat daar gesit het, het by hulleself gedink: “Wat? Dis tog laster! Net God kan sondes vergewe!”

Jesus het sonder meer geweet wat hulle dink en sê toe vir hulle: “Waarom dink julle dit is laster? Wat is makliker – om vir die verlamde te sê: ‘Jou sondes word vergewe,’ of om te sê: ‘Staan op, tel jou bed op en loop’? Ek gaan nou vir julle bewys dat Ek, die Seun van die Mens, die gesag het om sondes op aarde te vergewe.” Daarop sê Jesus vir die verlamde man: “Ek beveel jou, staan op, vat jou mat en gaan na jou huis toe!” Net daar het die man opgespring, sy mat geneem en voor almal se oë buitentoe gegaan. Hulle was almal verstom en het God geprys en uitgeroep: “So iets het ons nog nooit tevore gesien nie!”

Jesus het toe weer na die strand toe gegaan. ’n Hele skare mense het na Hom toe gekom, en Hy was besig om hulle te onderrig. Terwyl Hy aanstap, sien Hy vir Levi, die seun van Alfeus, by die tolhokkie sit en Hy sê vir hom: “Kom, word my dissipel.” Hy het opgestaan en ’n

dissipel van Jesus geword.

Levi het Jesus en sy dissipels genooi om saam met sy medetollenaars en ander berugte sondaars by hom te kom eet. (Daar was baie van hierdie mense wat agter Jesus aangekom het.) Toe sommige van die skrifkenners uit die geledere van die Fariseërs sien dat Hy saam met sulke berugte sondaars en tollenaars eet, het hulle vir sy dissipels gesê: “Hoe kan julle leermeester saam met sulke immorele karakters eet?”

Toe Jesus dit hoor, sê Hy vir hulle: “Gesonde mense het die dokter nie nodig nie – die siekes wel. Ek het nie gekom om regverdiges te roep nie, maar sondaars.”

Jesus het van die begin af na 'n ander tipe rabbi gelyk. Dit wou voorkom of Hy alle tradisionele wette wat aanvaarbare gedrag vir Joodse mense voorgeskryf het, verwerp het. Sy “nuwe manier” was vergewend en vriendelik. Jesus het nie soos 'n opstoker voorgekom nie, maar as 'n vriend van die verstotes, mense wat daarvan verdink is dat hulle nie rein was nie, mense van wie die godsdienstige leiers nie gehou het nie.

Jesus het weer na die sinagoge toe gegaan. Daar was 'n man met 'n misvormde hand. Omdat dit op die Sabbat was, het Jesus se vyande Hom fyn dopgehou. Sou Hy die man se hand op die Sabbat gesond maak? Indien wel, sou hulle Hom kon aankla. Hy sê toe vir die man met die misvormde hand: “Kom staan hier in die middel.”

Daarna sê Hy vir sy teenstanders: “Mag 'n mens goeddoen op die Sabbat of kwaad? Is hierdie dag bedoel om 'n lewe te red of te vernietig?” Maar hulle wou Hom nie antwoord nie.

Terwyl hulle so rondom Hom staan, het Hy hulle die een na die ander met verontwaardiging aangekyk, diep bedroef oor die gevoelloosheid van hulle harte. Toe sê Hy vir die man: “Steek uit jou hand.” Hy het dit uitgesteek, en sy hand het gesond geword. Dadelik het die Fariseërs uitgegaan en saam met Herodes se ondersteuners gaan beplan hoe hulle Jesus gaan doodmaak.

Jesus het deur die hele Galilea rondgegaan. Hy het die mense in hulle sinagoges onderrig, die Goeie Nuus van God se koningsheerskappy aangekondig en elke siekte en kwaal onder die volk gesond gemaak. Kort voor lank het die nuus oor Hom oor die hele provinsie van Sirië versprei. Die mense het almal wat siek was na Hom toe gebring: dié wat geteister was deur allerhande siektes en

pyne, dié in wie daar duiwels was, epileptici, verlamdes – en Hy het hulle gesond gemaak. 'n Groot skare uit Galilea, Dekapolis, Jerusalem, Judea en die Transjordan het Hom begin volg.

Jesus het aan sy dissipels opdrag gegee om 'n bootjie vir Hom gereed te hou om te voorkom dat die skare Hom vertrap. Hy het daardie dag baie mense gesond gemaak met die gevolg dat almal met die een of ander kwaal Hom oorval het sodat hulle aan Hom kon raak. Telkens wanneer dié wat van onrein geeste besete was Hom sien, het hulle voor Hom neergeval en geskree: “Jy is die Seun van God!” Maar Jesus het hulle streng gewaarsku om nie te sê wie Hy is nie.

Die Jode was oortuig dat wanneer die langverwagte Messias kom, hy die mense van politieke onderdrukking sou red. Hy sou hulle bevry van die mag van die Romeinse Ryk. Hulle was op soek na 'n aardse koning wat hulle nasie aan bewind sou bring. Maar Jesus se doel was baie dieper, sy intensies belangriker, en sy koningskap oneindig glorieryker as wat die mense verwag het. Hulle moes die ware betekenis van die woord “Messias” – Gesalfde Een – ontdek. Hulle moes ontdek wie Jesus werklik is. Eers dan sou hulle sy toestemming hê om die Goeie Nuus te versprei.

Hierna het Jesus teen 'n berg opgegaan en dié na Hom toe geroep wat Hy by Hom wou hê. En hulle het na Hom toe gekom. Hy het twaalf gekies om gereeld by Hom te wees en hulle apostels genoem. Hy wou hulle stuur om te gaan preek, en om met volmag duiwels uit te dryf. Hier volg die name van die twaalf wat Hy gekies het: Simon (Jesus het sy naam verander na Petrus), Jakobus en Johannes (die seuns van Sebedeus, maar Jesus het hulle die bynaam “Seuns van die Donder” gegee), Andreas, Filippus, Bartolomeus, Matteus, Tomas, Jakobus (die seun van Alfeus), Taddeus, Simon (die Yweraar), Judas Iskariot (wat Hom later uitgelewer het).

Nie lank hierna nie het Jesus begin met 'n reis deur al die dorpe en kleiner plekkies om die Goeie Nuus oor die koningsheerskappy van God bekend te maak. Hy het sy twaalf dissipels saamgeneem, asook 'n paar vroue wat Hy gesond gemaak het en uit wie Hy bese geeste gedryf het. Onder hulle was Maria Magdalena uit wie Hy sewe bese geeste gedryf het, Johanna, die vrou van Gusa, Herodes se sakebestuurder, Susanna en baie ander wat uit hulle eie middele bygedra het om Jesus en sy dissipels te onderhou.

Klaarblyklik het selfs Johannes die Doper nie regtig verstaan wie Jesus werklik was nie. Johannes het aangekondig dat Jesus die komende Messias was, maar Jesus se werke het nie die resultate tot gevolg gehad wat Johannes klaarblyklik verwag het nie. Saam met Johannes se teleurstelling was daar ook die feit dat hy vir 'n lang tyd in die tronk was omdat hy Herodes Antipas in die openbaar gekritiseer het.

Herodes Antipas was een van Herodes die Grote, wat in die tyd van Jesus se geboorte regeer het, se seuns. Hy was 'n Romeinse marionet wat as heerser oor Galilea aangestel was, en hy het sy broer se vrou oortuig om haar man te verlaat en met hom te trou, 'n oortreding van die Joodse wet. Johannes is toegesluit omdat hy Herodes op hierdie sonde gewys het.

Johannes het in die tronk gehoor wat Jesus doen – werke soos dié wat die verwagte Messias sou doen. Hy stuur toe van sy dissipels om vir Jesus te vra: “Is U werklik die Messias wat sou kom, of moet ons tog iemand anders verwag?”

Jesus het hulle geantwoord: “Gaan vertel vir Johannes wat julle hoor en sien – blindes sien en verlamdes loop, mense met ernstige velsiektes word gesond en dowes hoor, dooies word opgewek en armes hoor die Goeie Nuus. En sê vir hom: ‘Gelukkig is elkeen vir wie Ek nie 'n struikelblok is nie.’”

Ná hulle vertrek het Jesus met die skare oor Johannes begin praat. “Wat het julle verwag toe julle uitgegaan het om hierdie man in die woestyn te gaan sien? Tog seker nie iemand wat soos 'n riet deur die wind heen en weer gewaai word nie? Tog seker ook nie iemand wat in weelderige klere uitgevat is nie? Die mense wat so aantrek, woon immers in paleise, nie in die woestyn nie. Het julle nie veel eerder uitgegaan omdat julle 'n profeet verwag het nie? Natuurlik! Ek verseker julle, hy was selfs meer as 'n profeet. Dit is hý van wie in die Skrif geskryf staan:

“Kyk, Ek stuur my boodskapper voor jou uit.
Hy sal die pad vir jou gereedmaak.’

“Ek verseker julle, onder al die mense wat ooit geleef het, is daar niemand groter as Johannes die Doper nie. Tog is selfs die onbelangrikste mensie in God se koninkryk nog belangriker as hy! Vandat Johannes die Doper begin preek het tot nou toe is God se koninkryk besig om vir homself 'n pad oop te breek en mense wat al hulle kragte daarop toespits, maak dit hulle eie. Al die profete en die

wet, tot Johannes self, het geprofeteer aangaande die huidige tyd. As julle bereid is om te aanvaar wat Ek vir julle sê – hý is die Elia wat sou kom.”

Jesus se antwoord aan Johannes het meer insig gegee in Jesus se rol as die Verlosser en Messias. Baie mense was geïnteresseerd in hierdie profeet en leermeester, en hulle wou meer hoor.

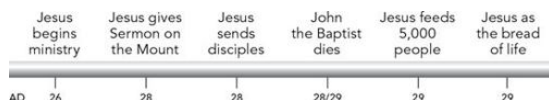
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No Ordinary Man

AGAIN JESUS BEGAN TO TEACH by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water’s edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: “Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”

Then Jesus said, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that,



“they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,

and ever hearing but never understanding;

otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”

Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop — some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”

“Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you — and even more. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain — first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much

as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

Jesus often used parables to teach the people. These stories, typically drawn from nature or everyday life, pointed out a central truth that called out an intended response from the listeners. On one occasion Jesus told three parables in response to the self-righteous complaints of the Pharisees and teachers of the law about the company Jesus kept.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs

were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Another time Jesus used a parable when he was questioned by a religious leader.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii¹ and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Besides teaching in parables, Jesus also taught in a more direct style, as seen in what came to be known as the “Sermon on the Mount.”

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely
say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad,
because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they
persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how
can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to
be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be
hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.
Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the
house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they
may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

“This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.’

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Jesus’ teachings moved many people and changed lives. However, those who continually heard his parables and sermons were his disciples. At one point during their travels together, the disciples’ trust in Jesus was put to the test when a violent storm overtook their boat.

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him

along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!” For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you impure spirit!”

Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.” He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and

countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man — and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. “Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?”

Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.”

He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, “Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, “*Talitha kum!*” (which means “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?”

“Yes, Lord,” they replied.

Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you”; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, “See that no one knows about this.” But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.”

But the Pharisees said, “It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.”

Jesus commissioned his closest followers, the 12 disciples, to spread out and tell people that the kingdom of God had come. He also gave them spiritual authority to heal people from sickness and demonic oppression.

This first band of preachers was sent out with almost no supplies in order to learn about faith and prayer. God performed many miracles through them, adding to the mounting excitement among the populace. A top official also heard the reports ... filtered through his guilty conscience.

King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

Others said, "He is Elijah."

And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

“The head of John the Baptist,” she answered.

At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: “I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”

The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “That would take more than half a year’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

“How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five — and two fish.”

Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples

to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the opposite shore of the lake realized that only one boat had been there, and that Jesus had not entered it with his disciples, but that they had gone away alone. Then some boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the people had eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

“Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life.² Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

“Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they

died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

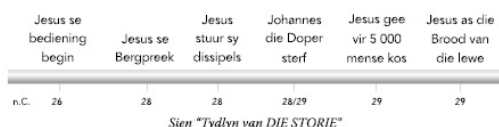
Then Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

Jesus could get very personal, in-your-face, below the surface. He had a rock-solid sense of who he was, and he wanted his followers to know him to the core. Listening to his teaching and admiring his character were not enough. To follow this rabbi, his followers needed to know him in a deeper way, a way that would change their hearts, pursuits and lives. He wanted to be the center, the joy, the “bread” and sustenance of their lives. As Jesus continued his ministry, he began to reveal more about who he was and why he had come.

1Denarii:A denarius was the daily wage of a day laborer.

2Bread of life:By saying this, Jesus was proclaiming that he is the source of true fulfillment and satisfaction.

Nie 'n gewone man nie



Jesus het toe weer die mense op die strand begin onderrig. Daar drom toe so 'n reuse skare om Hom saam dat Hy in 'n skuif wat op die water vasgemeer was, gaan sit het terwyl die hele menigte op die strand was. Hy het hulle toe breedvoerig deur middel van gelykenisse onderrig. Hier volg 'n tipiese gelykenis: “Luister nou goed,” het Jesus gesê. “'n Boer het eendag lande toe gegaan om te saai. In die saaiproses het party van die saad op 'n voetpaadjie geval en die voëls het dit kom oppik. 'n Ander deel het weer op klipperige aarde sonder enige diepte geval. As gevolg van die vlak grond het dit vinnig opgeskiet. Maar toe die son warm begin bak, het dit verlep en omdat dit nie diep wortelgeskiet het nie, het dit toe heeltemal verdroog. Nog 'n deel het tussen die dorings geval. Toe die dorings opkom, het dit die koring verstik en dit het geen oes voortbring nie. Nog ander saad het op goeie grond geval. Dit het opgekom, gegroei en 'n oes voortbring – tot 30 en 60 en 100 maal wat oorspronklik gesaai is.

“Elkeen wat kan hoor,” het Jesus gesê, “moet goed luister na wat Ek sê.”

Later, toe Jesus alleen was saam met die twaalf dissipels en sy ander mense, het hulle Hom uitgevra: “Wat beteken hierdie gelykenisse?” Jesus het hulle geantwoord: “Julle word bevoorreg om die geheim van God se koningsheerskappy te verstaan. Maar vir die buitelanders bly hierdie dinge blote gelykenisse sodat die Skrifwoord vervul kan word:

“Sodat hulle sien wat Ek doen, maar nie die bedoeling daarvan verstaan nie;
sodat hulle my woorde hoor, en dit tog nie begryp nie;

sodat hulle nie van hulle sondes wegdraai
en vergewe word nie.”

Hy sê toe vir hulle: “As julle nie hierdie gelykenis verstaan nie, hoe sal julle al die ander begryp wat Ek vir julle gaan vertel? Die boer waarvan Ek julle vertel het, is die een wat die saad van die woord uitstrooi. Hulle by wie die saad op die voetpaadjie val, staan vir die mense wat die woord hoor, maar dan kom Satan dadelik en vat die woord wat op hulle lewens gesaai is, weg. En hulle by wie op klipperige grond gesaai is, staan vir die mense wat die woord hoor en dit dadelik vol blydschap aanneem. Maar soos dit met jong plantjies in sulke grond gaan, skiet hulle nie diep wortel nie. Hulle hou net vir ’n rukkie. Sodra daar probleme of vervolging ter wille van die Goeie Nuus kom, struikel hulle dadelik in die geloof. Daardie mense by wie tussen die dorings gesaai is, staan vir die mense wat die woord hoor, maar die bekommernisse van hierdie lewe en die lokstem van die rykdom en die hunkering na allerhande goed verstik gou die woord, en dit bly sonder vrug. Maar hulle by wie op die goeie grond gesaai is, is die mense wat die woord hoor en dit aanneem en ’n groot oes oplewer – party 30, party 60, party selfs 100 maal wat oorspronklik gesaai is.”

Jesus het vir hulle gesê: “’n Lamp is tog sekerlik nie bedoel om onder ’n emmer of onder ’n bed gesit te word nie. Dis mos bedoel om op ’n lampstaander gesit te word waar dit sy lig kan versprei. Alles wat nou geheim is, sal bekendgemaak word. Alles wat nou verborge is, sal aan die lig kom. Elkeen wat kan hoor, moet goed luister na wat Ek sê.”

Hy het ook vir hulle gesê: “Maak seker dat julle goed aandag gee aan wat julle van My hoor. Hoe meer julle luister, hoe meer sal julle verstaan – en julle sal boonop nog meer ontvang. Wie hulle oopstel vir my onderrig – vir hulle sal nog meer gegee word. Maar wie dit nie doen nie – van hulle sal selfs die bietjie wat hulle het, ook nog weggeneem word.”

Jesus het ook gesê: “God se koningsheerskappy is soos ’n boer wat saad op sy land saai. Dan gaan hy voort met sy ander daaglikse aktiwiteite. Intussen ontkiem en groei die saad – hoe, weet hy self nie mooi nie. Die grond produseer die graan vanself: eers kom die eerste blaartjie uit, dan vorm die aar en uiteindelik sit die volgroeide koringkorrel in die aar. En sodra die koring ryp is, steek die boer die sekel in, want die oestyd is daar.

“Waarmee kan Ek die koningsheerskappy van God vergelyk?” het

Jesus gevra. “En met watter gelykenis sal ons dit toelig? Dis soos ’n mosterdsaadjie wat wel die kleinste van alle sade is, maar nadat dit geplant is, skiet dit op en word groter as al die plante in die tuin. Dit maak takke wat so groot word dat die voëls veilig daarin kan kom nes maak.”

Jesus het baie sulke gelykenisse gebruik om die woord aan die mense te bedien volgens wat hulle kon verstaan. Eintlik het Hy in sy openbare onderrig net gelykenisse gebruik, maar wanneer Hy agterna alleen was saam met sy dissipels, het Hy alles vir hulle verder verduidelik.

Jesus het dikwels gelykenisse gebruik om mense te leer. Hierdie stories, wat dikwels gebruik maak van dinge in die natuur of die elkedagse lewe, het heengewys na ’n sentrale waarheid wat ’n sekere reaksie van die luisteraar opgeroep het. Eenkeer het Jesus drie gelykenisse vertel in antwoord op die selfvoldane klagtes van die Fariseërs en wetskenners oor die mense saam met wie Jesus sy tyd deurgebring het.

Tollenaars en ander sondaars het dikwels na Jesus se onderrig kom luister. Fariseërs en wetskenners het beswaar gemaak dat Hy met veragtelike mense geassosieer het – en selfs saam met hulle geëet het!

Jesus het toe hierdie gelykenis vertel: “As jy 100 skaap het en een het verdwaal en verlore geraak, sal jy nie die 99 ander net daar laat staan en die een gaan soek tot jy hom kry nie? En dan sal jy hom met blydschap op jou skouers huis toe dra. Wanneer jy tuis is, sal jy jou vriende en bure roep om saam bly te wees omdat jy jou verlore skaap gevind het. Net so sal die hemel blyer wees oor een sondaar wat tot inkeer kom as oor 99 ander wat regverdig is en nie nodig het om tot inkeer te kom nie!

“Of veronderstel ’n vrou het tien waardevolle silwermuntstukke en verloor een daarvan. Sal sy nie ’n lamp opsteek en die huis van hoek tot kant uitvee totdat sy dit kry nie? En wanneer sy dit kry, roep sy haar vriende en bure om saam bly te wees omdat sy haar muntstuk gevind het. Net so is daar blydschap onder God se engele as net een sondaar tot inkeer kom.”

Om dié punt verder te verklaar, het Jesus vir hulle die volgende verhaal vertel: “’n Man het twee seuns gehad. Die jongste het vir sy pa gesê: ‘Ek wil my deel van die boedel nou hê, eerder as om te wag tot Pa doodgaan.’ Die pa het toe ingestem om sy goed tussen sy twee seuns te verdeel.

“’n Paar dae later het hierdie jonger seun al sy besittings in geld omskep, na ’n ver land gereis, en daar al sy geld verkwis met ’n uitspattige lewe. Teen die tyd dat sy geld opgeraak het, het ’n groot hongersnood oor die land gekom en hy het begin honger ly. Hy kry toe werk by ’n plaaslike boer en dié het hom die veld ingestuur om varke op te pas. Die seun het só honger geword dat selfs die peule wat die varke gevreet het, vir hom smaaklik gelyk het. Maar niemand het hom enigiets gegee om te eet nie.

“Toe hy uiteindelik tot sy sinne kom, het hy vir homself gesê: ‘By die huis het selfs die gehuurde werkers meer as genoeg kos, en hier is ek besig om van honger dood te gaan! Ek sal teruggaan na my pa toe en vir hom sê: Pa, ek het gesondig teen die hemel én teen Pa; ek is nie langer werd om Pa se seun genoem te word nie. Neem my asseblief in diens as ’n gehuurde werker.’ Daarop het hy teruggegaan na sy pa toe.

“En toe hy nog ver weg was, het sy pa hom gesien aankom. Oorweldig met liefde en deernis het hy na sy seun toe gehardloop, hom omhels en gesoen.

“Sy seun het vir hom gesê: ‘Pa, ek het gesondig teen die hemel én teen Pa; ek is nie langer werd om Pa se seun genoem te word nie.’

“Maar sy pa sê vir die bediendes: ‘Gou, bring die mooiste mantel in die huis, en trek dit vir hom aan. Kry ’n ring vir sy vinger, en sandale vir sy voete. En slag die vetgemaakte kalf. Ons moet feesvier, want hierdie seun van my was dood en hy het nou teruggekeer na die lewe. Hy was verlore, maar nou is hy gevind.’ Toe het hulle begin feesvier.

“Intussen het die ouer seun in die veld gewerk. Toe hy terugkom huis toe, hoor hy musiek en dansery in die huis, en hy vra toe een van die bediendes wat aangaan. ‘Jou broer is terug!’ is vir hom gesê. ‘En jou pa het die vetgemaakte kalf geslag. Ons vier fees omdat hy veilig teruggekom het.’

“Die ouer broer het hom liederlik vererg en wou nie ingaan nie. Sy pa het toe uitgekóm en hom gesoebat, maar hy het geantwoord: ‘Ek het al die jare hard gewerk vir Pa en nooit geweier om enigiets te doen wat Pa my gesê het om te doen nie. En in al die tyd het Pa my nie eers ’n bokkie gegee om saam met my vriende fees te vier nie. Maar toe hierdie seun van Pa terugkom nadat hy Pa se geld op prostitute gemors het, vier Pa fees en slag die beste kalf wat ons het.’

“Sy pa het vir hom gesê: ‘Kyk, Seun, ek en jy is nog altyd hier bymekaar en alles wat ek het, is tog joune. Ons moet hierdie gelukkige dag vier. Want jou broer was dood en het teruggekom na die lewe! Hy was verlore, maar nou is hy gevind!’”

’n Ander keer het Jesus ’n gelykenis gebruik toe Hy deur ’n godsdienstige leier uitgevra is.

Eendag het ’n wetskenner na vore gekom om Jesus te toets deur Hom hierdie vraag te vra: “Leermeester, wat moet ek doen om die ewige lewe te ontvang?”

Jesus het geantwoord: “Wat sê die wet van Moses? Wat lees jy daarin?”

Die man het geantwoord: “Jy moet die Here jou God liefhê met jou hele hart, jou hele siel, al jou krag en jou hele verstand.’ En: ‘Jy moet jou medemens liefhê soos jouself.”

“Reg!” het Jesus vir hom gesê. “Doen dit en jy sal lewe!”

Maar die man wou homself regverdig en vra toe vir Jesus: “En wie is my medemens?”

En Jesus antwoord: “’n Joodse man was op reis van Jerusalem na Jerigo toe hy deur rowers aangeval is. Hulle het sy klere uitgetrek, hom aangerand en halfdood langs die pad laat lê. En toe is hulle vort.

“Toevallig kom daar ’n Joodse priester verby, maar toe hy die man daar sien lê, het hy aan die ander kant by hom verbygegaan.

“So het ook ’n Leviet daar aangekom, die man een kyk gegee en ook aan die ander kant verbygegaan.

“Toe het ’n Samaritaan verbygekom, en toe hy die man sien, het hy hom innig jammer gekry. Die Samaritaan kniel toe langs hom, behandel sy wonde met medisyne, en verbind dit. Toe het hy die man op sy eie donkie gehelp en hom na ’n herberg geneem en daar verder versorg. Die volgende dag gee hy vir die herbergier twee silwermuntstukke en vra hom om die man te versorg. ‘As die rekening meer as dit is,’ het hy gesê, ‘sal ek die verskil betaal wanneer ek weer hierlangs kom.’

“Nou, watter van hierdie drie sou jy sê, was ’n naaste vir die man wat deur die rowers aangeval is?” het Jesus gevra.

Die man het geantwoord: “Die een wat aan hom medelye bewys het.”

Toe het Jesus gesê: “Gaan nou, en doen jy dieselfde.”

Buiten om deur gelykenisse te onderrig, het Jesus ook op ’n meer direkte manier onderrig gegee, soos gesien kan word in die Bergpreek.

Toe Jesus die groot skare mense bymekaar sien, het Hy teen die berg uitgeklim. Toe Hy gaan sit, kom sy dissipels na Hom toe. Hy het begin om hulle soos volg te onderrig:

“Gelukkig is dié mense wat weet hoe nodig hulle God het,
want die koninkryk van die hemele is hulle deel.

Gelukkig is die treurendes,
want God sal self hulle trane afvee.

Gelukkig is dié wat sag van hart is,
want die nuwe aarde sal hulle erfporse wees.

Gelukkig is dié wat honger en dors
na wat voor God reg is,
want Hy sal hulle hartsverlange bevredig.

Gelukkig is dié wat met ontferming uitreik
na mense in nood,
want God sal Hom oor hulle ontferm.

Gelukkig is dié wie se harte volkome op God gerig is,
want hulle sal vir God sien.

Gelukkig is die vredemakers,
want God sal vir hulle sê: ‘Julle is my kinders.’

Gelukkig is dié wat vervolg word
ter wille van wat voor God reg is,
want die koninkryk van die hemele is hulle deel.

“Gelukkig is julle wanneer julle bespot en vervolg word en allerhande leuens oor julle versprei word omdat julle my dissipels is. Wees bly, ja, jubel daaroor, want God sal julle ryklik daarvoor beloon. Onthou, so het hulle die profete voor julle ook vervolg.

“Julle is die sout wat die aarde ’n beter plek moet maak. Maar as die sout verslaan het, kry jy dit op geen manier weer sout nie. Dit is totaal onbruikbaar. Al waarvoor dit goed is, is om buite op die straat uitgegooi en deur die mense platgetrap te word.

“Julle is die lig wat die wêreld moet verlig. ’n Stad wat bo-op ’n berg lê, kan mos nie weggesteek word nie! ’n Mens steek ook nie ’n lamp op en maak dit onder ’n emmer toe nie. Inteendeel! Jy sit dit bo-op ’n lampstaander. Dan maak dit lig vir almal in die huis. Julle moet so voorbeeldig lewe dat julle ’n helder lig sal laat uitstraal. Dan sal die mense dit sien en julle hemelse Vader daarvoor prys!

“En nou wat die gebed betref: Moenie soos die skynheiliges wees wat daarvan hou om in die sinagoges en op die straathoeke te bid sodat die mense hulle kan sien nie. Ek verseker julle, dit is al beloning wat hulle ooit sal kry. Wanneer jy bid, gaan na die stilste vertrek in die huis en maak die deur agter jou toe sodat jy daar in jou alleenheid tot jou Vader kan bid. En jou Vader wat alles weet, sal jou beloon.

“Wanneer julle bid, moenie met woorde mors soos die ongelowiges nie. Hulle dink hulle stortvloed woorde sal maak dat hulle gebede beantwoord word. Moenie soos hulle maak nie, want julle Vader weet presies wat julle behoeftes is, selfs nog voordat julle Hom vra!

“Bid dan soos volg:

“Ons Vader in die hemel,
laat u Naam geheilig word.
Laat u koninkryk kom.
Laat u wil hier op aarde
 uitgevoer word soos in die hemel.
Gee ons die porsie brood
 wat ons vir vandag nodig het.
En vergeef ons ons sondeskuld
 soos ons ook óns skuldenaars vergewe het.
Bewaar ons sodat ons
 nie aan verleiding sal toegee nie;
maar bevry ons van die greep van die Bose.

“As julle die mense vergewe wat teen julle oortree, sal julle hemelse Vader julle ook vergewe. Maar as julle weier om die mense te vergewe, sal julle Vader julle ook nie julle oortredings vergewe nie.

“Moenie vir julle hier op aarde skatte bymekaarmaak waar mot en roes dit wegvreet en diewe inbreek en roof nie. Maak vir julle skatte in die hemel bymekaar waar geen mot en roes dit sal kan bykom nie, en waar diewe nooit sal kan inbreek en roof nie. Onthou, waar jou skat is, daar sal jou hart ook wees.

“Jou oog is ’n lamp vir jou liggaam. ’n Suiwer oog laat die lig instroom sodat jou binneste geheel en al lig word. Maar as jou oog vuil en sleg is, versper dit die lig en jou binneste bly geheel en al donker. As die lig wat jy gedink het jy het, in werklikheid donkerte is, hoe pikswart is jou donker dan nie!

“Niemand kan tegelyk twee base dien nie. Hy sal óf ’n renons in die een hê en van die ander een hou; óf hy sal aan die een lojaal wees en die ander een geringskat. Om God én die geldgod saam te dien, is onmoontlik.

“Daarom sê Ek vir julle, hou op om julle te bekommer oor julle daaglikse lewe – wat julle sal eet of drink; of oor julle liggame – wat julle sal aantrek. Is die lewe nie baie belangriker as kos nie? En is ’n mens se liggaam nie baie belangriker as klere nie? Hou die voëls wat

daar vlieg dop. Hulle saai nie, hulle oes nie, en hulle maak nie in skure bymekaar nie. Dit is onnodig, want julle hemelse Vader gee aan hulle hulle kos. Besef julle dan nie dat julle vir God nog baie kosbaarder is as hulle nie? Kan al julle bekommernis julle lewe een sekonde langer rek?

“En wat klere betref – wat bekommer julle julle daaroor? Leer hierdie les van die veldlelies wat so pragtig in die blom staan. Hulle sloof hulle nie af om vir hulleself klere te maak nie. En tog sê Ek vir julle, selfs Salomo in al sy glorie was nie so pragtig aangetrek soos een van hulle nie.

“As God dan die veldplante wat vandag daar is en môre verbrand word, so mooi aantrek, hoeveel te meer sal Hy nie vir julle sorg nie? Is julle geloof dan so klein?

“Moet julle dus nie bekommer en vra: ‘Wat sal ons tog eet?’ of: ‘Wat sal ons drink?’ of: ‘Wat sal ons aantrek?’ nie. Dit is die ongelowiges wat oor hierdie soort dinge begaan is. Julle hemelse Vader weet tog dat julle dit alles nodig het. Nee, maak die koningsheerskappy van God en dit wat voor Hom reg is, julle prioriteit; dan sal God vir julle al hierdie ander dinge byvoeg. Moet julle daarom nie oor môre bekommer nie. Môre sal sy eie bekommernisse bring. Vandag se moeilikhede is vir een dag heeltemal genoeg.

“Elkeen wat na my woorde luister en daarvolgens handel, is soos ’n verstandige persoon wie se huis op rots gebou is. Al val daar ’n stortbui, en al kom die vloedwater af, en al woed daar stormwinde teen die huis, sal dit nie inmekaarstort nie, want sy fondament is stewig op die rots vas. Maar elkeen wat na my woorde luister en dit nie doen nie, sal wees soos ’n dwaas wie se huis op die sand gebou is. Wanneer daar ’n stortbui val, en die vloedwater afkom, en die stormwinde waai, sal daardie huis heeltemal inmekaarstort.”

Jesus se leringe het baie mense geraak en lewens verander. Dié wat gedurig sy gelykenisse en preke gehoor het, was egter sy dissipels. Op een punt gedurende hulle reise is die dissipels se vertroue in Jesus getoets toe hulle in ’n geweldige storm vasgevang is.

Teen die aand sê Jesus vir sy dissipels: “Kom ons vaar oorkant toe.” Hulle het die skare toe agtergelaat en Jesus – Hy was immers alreeds in die skuut – sommer net so saamgeneem (alhoewel daar ander skuite agternagekom het). Daar het ’n hewige stormwind opgekom. Groot golwe het teen die skuut gebreek, met die gevolg dat dit alreeds vol

water begin word het. Jesus het agter in die skuit gelê en slaap met sy kop op 'n kussing. Sy dissipels maak Hom toe wakker en sê vir Hom: “Leermeester, gee U nie om dat ons besig is om te vergaan nie?”

Jesus het opgestaan, die stormwind ernstig aangespreek en vir die see gesê: “Bedaar! Word kalm!” Toe het die wind gaan lê en daar het 'n groot rustigheid gekom.

Hy vra toe vir hulle: “Hoekom is julle so verskrik? Vertrou julle My nog steeds nie?”

Hulle was heeltemal oorweldig en het vir mekaar gesê: “Wie is Hy werklik? Selfs die wind en die see luister na Hom!”

Hulle het toe oorkant die see in die gebied van die Geraseners aangekom. Net toe Jesus uit die skuit klim, het 'n man met 'n onrein gees Hom van die begraafplaas af tegemoetgehardloop. Hy het tussen die grafte gebly. Hy kon op geen manier beheer word nie – selfs nie met 'n ketting nie. Hy is dikwels met voet- en handboeie vasgemaak; dan het hy die handboeie oopgeforseer en die voetboeie uitmekaargeruk. Gevolglik kon net mooi niemand hom beheer nie. Die hele tyd, dag en nag, was hy tussen die grafte en op die hoogtes aan die skree terwyl hy homself met klippe stukkend kap.

Hy het Jesus van ver af raakgesien. Toe hardloop hy nader en val voor Hom neer. Hy het met 'n harde stem geskreeu: “Los my uit, Jesus, Seun van God die Allerhoogste! In Godsnaam, moenie my seermaak nie!” (Die rede hiervoor was dat Jesus alreeds vir hom gesê het: “Onrein gees, gaan uit die man uit!”)

Toe vra Jesus hom: “Wat is jou naam?”

“My naam is Legio,” antwoord hy, “want ons is baie.” Daarna het die onrein geeste Jesus gesmeek om hulle nie heeltemal landuit te stuur nie.

Teen die heuwel was daar 'n groot trop varke aan die wei. Die onrein geeste smeek Hom toe: “Stuur ons in die varke in. Laat ons in hulle invaar.” Jesus het hulle dit toegelaat. Die onrein geeste het uit die man gegaan en in die varke in. Die trop van omtrent 2 000 hardloop toe teen die skuinste af die see in, waar hulle versuip het.

Hulle wagters het weggehardloop en die nuus in die dorp en op die plase gaan vertel. Daarop het die mense gekom om self te sien wat gebeur het. Toe hulle by Jesus kom en die man wat die menigte beseeste gehad het daar sien sit, behoorlik aangetrek en by sy volle positiewe, was hulle verskrik. Die mense wat dit gesien het, vertel toe vir hulle wat met die besetene en die varke gebeur het. Hulle het vir Jesus gesoebat om uit hulle omgewing weg te gaan.

Toe Jesus weer terug was in die skuit, het die man wat voorheen besete was, Hom gesmeek om saam met Hom te mag gaan. Jesus het egter vir hom gesê: “Nee, gaan huis toe na jou mense toe. Vertel vir hulle wat die Here vir jou gedoen het, en hoe goed Hy vir jou was.” Hy het wyd en syd in die Tien Stede-gebied gaan vertel wat Jesus vir hom gedoen het. En almal was verwonderd oor wat hy aan hulle vertel het.

Daarna het Jesus weer per skuit die see oorgesteek. Daar het ’n groot skare op die strand om Hom saamgedrom. ’n Leier van die plaaslike sinagoge, ’n man met die naam Jairo, kom toe na Hom toe. Toe hy Jesus sien, val hy voor Hom neer en pleit ernstig by Hom: “My dogtertjie is op haar laaste. Kom sit tog u hande op haar sodat sy gesond kan word en bly lewe.” Jesus het toe saam met hom gegaan.

’n Groot klomp mense het agter Hom aangekom en teen Hom saamgedrom. Daar was ’n vrou onder hulle wat vir twaalf jaar aan bloedvloeiing gely het. Sy het baie swaargeskry onder die baie dokters wat haar behandel het, en om haar dokterskoste te dek het sy alles bestee wat sy gehad het. Tog het sy niks beter geword nie, maar eerder agteruitgegaan. Toe sy van Jesus hoor, het sy deur die skare gebeur en van agter aan sy klere geraak. Sy het gedink: “As ek net aan sy klere kan raak, sal ek gesond word.” Die bloeding het dadelik gestop en sy kon aan haar liggaam agterkom dat sy gesond is.

Jesus het dadelik agtergekom dat daar genesingskrag van Hom uitgegaan het. Daarom het Hy so tussen die baie mense omgedraai en gevra: “Wie het aan my klere geraak?”

Sy dissipels protesteer toe: “U sien tog hoe die massa U verdring. Hoe kan U vra: ‘Wie het aan my klere geraak?’”

Maar Jesus het bly rondkyk om te sien wie dit gedoen het. Onder die besef van wat met haar gebeur het, het die vrou, bewend van angs, voor Hom kom neerval en vir Hom alles openhartig vertel. Hy het vir haar gesê: “My dogter, omdat jy so vas geglo het, het jy gesond geword. Gaan in vrede en wees vir altyd genees van jou kwaal.”

Terwyl Hy nog besig was om met haar te praat, kom daar boodskappers van Jairo se huis af met die boodskap: “Jou dogter is dood. Dit sal nie help om die leermeester langer lastig te val nie.”

Jesus het die boodskap egter gehoor en vir Jairo gesê: “Moet jou nie ontstel nie; vertrou net.”

Jesus het die menigte gestop en niemand toegelaat om verder saam met Hom te gaan nie, behalwe Petrus en Jakobus en sy broer Johannes. Toe hulle by die huis van die leier van die sinagoge

aankom, sien Jesus die hele gedoente van mense wat huil en klaagkrete laat hoor. Hy gaan toe in die huis in en sê vir die mense: “Waarom lawaai en huil julle so? Die kind is nie dood nie; sy slaap net.” Die klomp het Hom uitgelag.

Maar Hy het almal buitentoe gestuur. Toe vat Hy die kindjie se pa en ma en die drie dissipels na die vertrek waar sy lê. Terwyl Hy haar hand vat, sê Hy vir die kind: “Dogtertjie, staan op!” Onmiddellik het die dogtertjie op haar voete gekom en begin rondstap – sy was immers al twaalf jaar oud. Haar ouers was absoluut in ekstase. Maar Jesus het hulle opdrag gegee om dit heeltemal stil te hou en vir haar iets te ete te gee.

Toe Jesus daarvandaan verder gaan, het twee blindes agter Hom aangekom. Hulle het hardop geskreeu: “Seun van Dawid, ontferm U tog oor ons!”

Nadat Jesus in die huis gegaan het, kom die blindes na Hom toe. Daarop sê Jesus vir hulle: “Glo julle regtig Ek kan julle gesond maak?”

Hulle sê vir Hom: “Ja, Here, ons glo U kan dit doen.”

Hy raak toe hulle oë aan en sê: “Soos julle geglo het, sal dit vir julle gebeur.” Daarop kon hulle sien! Jesus het hulle toe ernstig gewaarsku: “Maak seker dat julle niemand hiervan vertel nie.” Ten spyte daarvan het hulle weggegaan en oral gaan vertel hoe wonderlik Jesus is.

Die twee wat gesond gemaak is, was nog besig om te vertrek toe mense iemand na Hom toe bring wat stom was omdat ’n bose gees beheer oor hom gehad het. Nadat Jesus die duiwel uit hom gejaag het, het die stom man begin praat. Die skare was oorweldig en het gesê: “So iets het nog nooit in Israel gebeur nie!”

Maar die Fariseërs se reaksie was: “Dit is die baasduiwel wat hom help om duiwels uit mense uit te jaag.”

Jesus het sy naaste volgelinge, die twaalf dissipels, opdrag gegee om uit te gaan en vir mense te gaan vertel dat God se koninkryk gekom het. Hy het hulle ook geestelike volmag gegee om mense te genees van siekte en demoniese onderdrukking.

Hierdie eerste groep predikers is uitgestuur met basies geen voorrade nie sodat hulle van geloof en gebed sou leer. God het baie wonderwerke deur hulle gedoen wat bygedra het tot die toenemende opgewondenheid onder die mense. ’n Hoofamptenaar het ook die verslae gehoor ... wat deurgesyfer het na sy skuldige gewete.

Herodes Antipas, die koning, het ook van Jesus gehoor, want almal

het van Hom gepraat. Party het gesê: “Hy moet Johannes die Doper wees wat uit die dood opgestaan het. Dit verklaar waarom Hy sulke wonderwerke kan doen.”

Ander het weer gesê dat Hy Elia is; nog ander dat Hy ’n profeet is en soos een van die groot profete uit die verlede optree.

Toe Herodes egter daarvan hoor, het hy verklaar: “Johannes, die einste man wat ek onthoof het, het uit die dood teruggekom.”

Herodes het voorheen, as ’n guns vir Herodias, soldate gestuur en Johannes laat arresteer en in die tronk opgesluit. Sy was na regte die vrou van sy broer Filippus, maar Herodes het haar as sy vrou gevat. Johannes het herhaaldelik vir Herodes gesê: “Dit is onwettig van u om u broer se vrou te vat.” Om hierdie rede het Herodias ’n wrok teen Johannes gekoester. Sy wou hom uit die weg ruim, maar sonder Herodes se toestemming was sy magteloos. Herodes het baie ontsag vir Johannes gehad, want hy het besef dat hy ’n goeie en ’n heilige man is. Hy het hom beskerm en graag na hom geluister, al het Johannes se woorde hom dikwels ongemaklik laat voel.

Herodias se kans het uiteindelik gekom toe Herodes op sy verjaarsdag ’n geselligheid vir sy amptenare en die weermagoffisiere en die hoëlui van Galilea gereël het. Sy dogter, wie se naam ook Herodias was, het in die feessaal ingekom en vir hulle gedans. Dit het groot byval by Herodes en al die gaste gevind.

“Vra my enigiets wat jy graag wil hê,” het Herodes vir die meisie gesê, “en ek sal dit vir jou gee.” Hy het herhaaldelik gesweer: “Ek sal enigiets wat jy van my vra vir jou gee, selfs tot die helfte van my koninkryk!”

Sy het toe uitgegaan en vir haar ma gaan vra: “Waarvoor moet ek vra?”

Daarna het haar ma gesê: “Vra vir die kop van Johannes die Doper!”

Sy is dadelik na die koning toe en het hom gevra: “Ek wil dadelik die kop van Johannes die Doper op ’n skinkbord hê.”

Die koning was baie ontsteld hieroor, maar omdat hy nie sy eed wou verbreek nie – dit boonop nog voor sulke belangrike gaste – wou hy die meisie nie weier nie. Hy het toe maar dadelik ’n soldaat gestuur met die opdrag om Johannes se kop te bring. Dié het Johannes toe in die tronk gaan onthoof en sy kop op ’n skinkbord gebring en vir die meisie kom gee. Sy het dit toe weer vir haar ma gegee. Toe Johannes se dissipels hiervan hoor, het hulle sy liggaam kom haal en dit begrawe.

Die apostels het na Jesus toe teruggekom en vir Hom alles vertel wat hulle gedoen en wat hulle die mense geleer het. Omdat daar voortdurend talle mense gekom en gegaan het sodat hulle selfs nie kans gekry het om te eet nie, het Jesus toe vir hulle gesê: “Kom julle nou self eenkant toe na ’n stil plek en skep ’n bietjie asem.”

Hulle het toe per skuit na ’n stil plek vertrek waar hulle alleen kon wees. Maar baie mense het hulle sien vertrek en agtergekom waarheen hulle op pad was. Hulle het toe te voet van al die dorpe daarheen aangehardloop gekom en Jesus en sy dissipels ingewag. Toe Jesus uit die skuit klim en die groot klomp mense sien, het Hy ’n diep deernis vir hulle gevoel, want hulle was soos skape sonder ’n wagter. Daarom het Hy hulle uitvoerig begin onderrig.

Toe dit alreeds laatmiddag begin word, kom sê sy dissipels vir Jesus: “Dis ’n verlate plek hierdie en kyk hoe laat is dit al. Stuur die mense weg sodat hulle op die omliggende plase en in die dorpies iets kan gaan koop om te eet.”

Hierop antwoord Jesus: “Gee julle vir hulle kos.”

Hulle sê toe vir Hom: “Dit sal ’n yslike bedrag kos om brood te gaan koop om vir hulle te ete te gee!”

Hy sê toe vir hulle: “Hoeveel brood het julle? Gaan vind uit.”

Toe hulle dit vasgestel het, sê hulle: “Vyf brode en twee visse.”

Daarna sê Jesus vir die mense om groepe te vorm en op die groen gras te gaan sit. Hulle het toe in groepe van 100 en 50 gaan sit. Jesus het die vyf brode en die twee visse gevat, na die hemel toe opgekyk en God gevra om die kos te seën. Toe breek Hy die brood en gee dit vir sy dissipels om aan die mense voor te sit. Hy het ook die twee visse onder almal verdeel. Hulle het almal geëet totdat hulle genoeg gehad het. Later het hulle twaalf mandjies vol oorskietbrood en -vis opgetel. ’n Volle 5 000 mans het van daardie vyf brode geëet!

Dadelik hierna het Jesus sy dissipels gedwing om weer in die skuit te klim en na die oorkant van die see te vaar terwyl Hy die mense intussen huis toe stuur. Daarna het Hy teen die berg uitgeklim om eenkant te gaan bid. Laataand was Hy alleen daar. Ondertussen was die skuit reeds ver van die land af. Met ’n sterk wind teen hulle moes hulle teen woeste golwe veg.

Kort voor dagbreek het Jesus op die see na hulle toe aangeloop gekom. Toe die dissipels Hom so op die see sien loop, was hulle verskrik, en hulle het benoud begin skree, want hulle het gedink dis ’n spook.

Maar Jesus het dadelik vir hulle gesê: “Toemaar, moet julle nie

ontstel nie. Dit is Ek.”

Petrus sê toe vir Hom: “Here, as dit regtig U is, laat my dan op die water na U toe kom.”

“Kom dan,” het Jesus gesê.

Petrus klim toe oor die kant van die skuit en begin op die water na Jesus toe loop. Maar toe hy die hoë golwe rondom hom sien, het hy paniekerig geword en begin sink. Hy skree toe vir Jesus: “Here, red my!”

Jesus het onmiddellik sy hand uitgesteek en hom gegryp. “Jou geloof is maar bitter klein,” sê Hy vir hom. “Waarom vertrou jy My nie?”

En toe hulle in die skuit terugklim, gaan lê die wind. Daarop het die mense in die skuit Hom aanbid. “U is werklik die Seun van God!” het hulle uitgeroep.

Nadat hulle die see oorgesteek het, het hulle by Gennesaret aan wal gegaan. Toe die plaaslike mense dit hoor, het hulle die nuus deur die hele omgewing versprei en al hulle siekes na Hom toe gebring. Die siekes het Hom gesmeek om aan Hom te mag raak, al was dit maar net aan die onderste rand van sy bo-kleed. En almal wat daaraan geraak het, het gesond geword.

Die volgende dag het die skare wat oorkant die meer gestaan het, gesien dat daar net een bootjie is. Hulle het geweet dat Jesus nie saam met sy dissipels in die boot geklim het nie, maar dat sy dissipels alleen weggevaar het. Daar het toe ook ander bootjies van Tiberias af aangekom, naby die plek waar die mense die brood geëet het nadat daarvoor gedank is. Toe die skare sien dat Jesus nie daar is nie en sy dissipels ook nie, het hulle self in bootjies geklim en na Kapernaum toe oorgevaar op soek na Jesus.

Toe hulle Hom oorkant die meer aantref, vra hulle vir Hom: “Rabbi, wanneer het u hier aangekom?”

Jesus het hulle geantwoord: “Ek verseker julle, julle soek My op, nie omdat julle die wondertekens gesien het nie, maar omdat julle van die brode geëet en versadig geword het. Julle moenie werk vir die kos wat vergaan nie, maar vir dié blywende kos wat lei tot die ewige lewe. Dit sal Ek, die Seun van die Mens, aan julle voorsien, want God die Vader het My daartoe bestem.”

Hulle het toe vir Hom gesê: “Wat moet ons doen om God se wil uit te voer?”

Jesus het hulle geantwoord: “Dít is God se opdrag aan julle: Glo in Hom wat die Vader gestuur het.”

Hulle sê vir Hom: “Watter wonderteken doen u dan sodat ons kan sien en tot geloof in u kan kom? Wat besonders doen u vir ons? Ons voorvaders het tog manna in die woestyn geëet soos daar geskryf staan: ‘Brood uit die hemel het Hy aan hulle gegee om te eet.’”

Jesus het hulle daarop geantwoord: “Ek verseker julle, dis nie Moses wat aan julle die brood uit die hemel gegee het nie, maar my Vader. En dit is Hy wat nou aan julle die ware brood uit die hemel gee. Die brood van God is Hy wat uit die hemel kom en aan die mensheid lewe gee.”

Hulle het toe vir Hom gesê: “Meneer, gee altyd vir ons hierdie brood.”

Jesus sê vir hulle: “Ek is die brood wat lewe gee. Wie na My toe kom, sal nooit weer honger word nie; en wie op My vertrou, sal nooit weer dors kry nie.

“Ek verseker julle, wie aanhou glo, het reeds die ewige lewe. Ek is die brood wat lewe gee. Julle voorvaders het in die woestyn manna geëet en tog gesterf. Hierdie is die brood wat uit die hemel gekom het sodat iemand daarvan kan eet en nie sterf nie. Ek is die brood wat lewe gee, wat uit die hemel gekom het. As iemand van hierdie brood eet, sal hy vir altyd lewe. En die brood wat Ek beskikbaar sal stel, is my liggaam. Dit doen Ek ter wille daarvan dat die wêreld kan lewe.”

Die Jode het toe heftig onder mekaar begin stry en gesê: “Hoe kan hierdie man sy liggaam aan ons gee om te eet?”

Jesus het toe teenoor hulle reageer: “Ek verseker julle, as julle nie die liggaam van die Seun van die Mens eet en sy bloed drink nie, het julle nie deel aan die lewe nie. Wie my liggaam eet en my bloed drink, besit die ewige lewe, en Ek sal hom op die laaste dag opwek. My liggaam is egte voedsel en my bloed is egte drank. Wie my liggaam eet en my bloed drink, beleef ’n innige verhouding met My en Ek met hom. Soos die lewende Vader My gestuur het en Ek deur die Vader lewe, só sal hy wat My eet, ook as gevolg van My lewe. Hierdie brood wat uit die hemel gekom het, is nie soos die voorvaders wat die manna geëet en gesterf het nie. Wie hierdie brood eet, sal vir altyd lewe.”

Hieroor het baie van Jesus se dissipels teruggegaan na hulle vroeëre lewe en nie meer saam met Hom die pad geloop nie.

Toe sê Jesus vir die twaalf: “Wil julle nie ook weggaan nie?”

Simon Petrus het Hom geantwoord: “Here, na wie toe sal ons weggaan? U het die woorde wat ewige lewe gee. Ons is daarvan

oortuig en weet dat U die Heilige van God is.”

Jesus het daarop teenoor hulle reageer: “Het Ek dan nie self julle twaalf uitgesoek nie? Maar een van julle is ’n duiwel!” Jesus het gepraat van Judas, die seun van Simon Iskariot, want hy sou Hom uitlewer, hy wat een van die twaalf was.

Jesus kon baie persoonlik, in jou gesig, onder die oppervlak wees. Hy het ’n vaste wete gehad van wie Hy was, en Hy wou hê sy volgelinge moet Hom volledig ken. Om na sy leringe te luister en Hom te bewonder, was nie genoeg nie. Om hierdie Rabbi te volg, moes sy volgelinge Hom op ’n dieper wyse ken, ’n manier wat hulle harte, strewes en lewens sou verander. Hy wou die middelpunt wees, die vreugde, die “brood” en kos vir hulle lewens. Soos Jesus voortgegaan het met sy bediening, het Hy meer van Homself bekendgemaak en hoekom Hy gekom het.

25

Jesus, the Son of God

JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

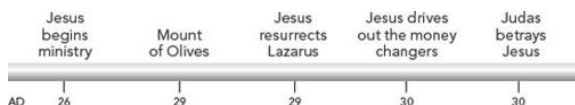
Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.”

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel¹ will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”



After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.

Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.

Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what “rising from the dead” meant.

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Remember King David and King Solomon? All the great kings of ancient Israel had been warriors, builders and diplomats. Little wonder that most people, if they believed at all in a coming Messiah, imagined the new king would be the greatest warrior, builder and deliverer of all. How odd, then, that Jesus seemed indifferent to regime change. His message was “Open your hearts to God.” He did not gather a cache of weapons or train a commando platoon for toppling Roman rule. This unexpected focus, coupled with Jesus’ insistence on genuine personal repentance, offended many in Jerusalem’s religious establishment. Some educated Pharisees considered him a teacher of dangerous and misleading philosophy. In the midst of growing Jewish opposition and common-folk popularity, Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the greatest of the Jewish holidays, the Festival of Tabernacles. He used the festival as a backdrop for revealing his authority, identity and mission.

Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, “Where is he?”

Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, “He is a good man.”

Others replied, “No, he deceives the people.” But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.

Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews there were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?”

At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, “Isn’t this the man they are trying to kill? Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.”

Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, “Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, but I know him because I am from him and he sent me.”

At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, “When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?”

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

On hearing his words, some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.”

Others said, “He is the Messiah.”

Still others asked, “How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David’s descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?” Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

When Jesus preached, he made many claims with which people took issue. He said he was the light—but only God himself is the source of light! He was from above—but only God claims residence in heaven! Jesus was setting out the clear and fateful choice: believe in him and know God’s power in your life, or stay in spiritual darkness. This message would change everything.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.”

Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.”

Once more Jesus said to them, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.”

This made the Jews ask, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come’?”

But he continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.”

Even as he spoke, many believed in him.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

“Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death.”

At this they exclaimed, “Now we know that you are demon-

possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

"You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

"Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

There it was. Jesus told the crowd that he existed before Abraham was even born. He told the crowd that his life was without beginning. He told the crowd he was God! The crowd turned into a lynch mob. Advisers might have urged Jesus to give the religious leaders time to cool off, but Jesus would not be stopped. He was driven by a passion to show people the glory of God, and even when a close friend was ill and near death, he used that experience as another example of God's power.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, "Let us go back to Judea."

"But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?"

Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light."

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary

aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

Jesus wept.

Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me."

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin.

“What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”

Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.”

He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.

Usually, people try to avoid trouble, yet Jesus set his direction straight toward those who were plotting to kill him. Jerusalem was the site of the Passover Festival celebration. People there needed to hear his message. Time was short. Jesus soon would enter Jerusalem for the last time.

People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good —

except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — along with persecutions — and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. “We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the

teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, many went up from the country to Jerusalem for their ceremonial cleansing before the Passover. They kept looking for Jesus, and as they stood in the temple courts they asked one another, “What do you think? Isn’t he coming to the festival at all?” But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him.

How many times had Jesus instructed his followers to hold back, to not tell who he was, to wait? And they had waited. Now the waiting was over. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, he let the crowds rejoice. He knew what this week would hold, but for the moment, those who loved him could cheer and celebrate.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’”

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna!”²

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and

asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“‘From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Jesus spent much of his final week teaching at the temple. Rabbis commonly lectured in the temple or the synagogues. But this rabbi was different. This teacher changed everything by implying that the Messiah, the one greater even than David, was speaking to them. No one had talked like this before. No one had dared.

While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:

“‘The Lord said to my Lord:
“Sit at my right hand

until I put your enemies
under your feet.’”

David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?"

The large crowd listened to him with delight.

The crowds liked Jesus, but the hatred of the religious leaders grew more intense. So human was Jesus that as his situation worsened, his heart was troubled. But Jesus faced his fear and refused to let it stop him from doing the will of God.

"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

"If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the

last day. For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

Behind the scenes, under the radar of politics or religious courts, a dark power was brewing and waiting. That evil power found an opening among Jesus’ intimate circle of followers. Just a touch of greed was all that power needed to accelerate the plot.

Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present.

1Gospel: The message that Jesus has come to reconcile humanity to God and that each individual can accept this undeserved gift and enter into a relationship with him; synonymous with *Good News*.

2Hosanna: A Hebrew expression meaning *Save!* which became an exclamation of praise.

Jesus, die Seun van God

Jesus en sy dissipels het Galilea verlaat en na die dorpie van Sesarea-Filippi gegaan. Op pad vra Hy sy dissipels toe: “Wie, sê die mense, is Ek werklik?”

“Wel,” antwoord hulle Hom, “party meen U is Johannes die Doper, ander weer Elia, nog ander die een of ander profeet.”

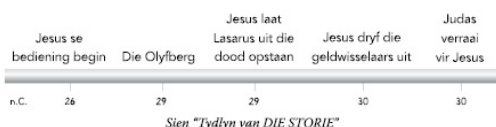
Hy sê vir hulle: “En wat van julle, wie sê julle is Ek?”

Petrus antwoord: “U is die Messias.”

Maar Jesus het aan hulle streng opdrag gegee om dit vir niemand te vertel nie.

Jesus het toe by hulle begin tuisbring dat God bepaal het dat Hy, die Seun van die Mens, baie dinge moet ly: Hy sal deur die familiehoofde, die priesterhoofde en die skrifkenners verwerp word. Hy sal doodgemaak word, maar sal ná drie dae weer opstaan. Hy het dit reguit vir hulle vertel. Maar Petrus vat Hom toe eenkant toe en begin Hom ernstig bestraf.

Jesus het Hom egter omgedraai, na sy dissipels gekyk en vir Petrus bestraf met die woorde: “Gee pad agter My, jou satan! Jy dink soos mense dink. Jy dink nie soos God dink nie.”



Toe roep Jesus sy dissipels en die skare na Hom toe en sê vir hulle: “As julle my volgelingen wil wees, moet julle julle eie ek prysgee, julle kruis opneem en agter My aankom. As julle probeer om julle lewe selfsugtig vir julleself te bewaar, sal julle dit verloor. Maar as julle julle lewe ter wille van My en ter wille van die Goeie Nuus prysgee, sal julle dit juis red. Wat sal dit jou tog help as jy alles in die lewe bereik, maar jou diepste menswees ly skade? Jy sal met niks ter wêreld daarvoor kan vergoed nie. As jy jou vir My en vir my boodskap skaam te midde van vandag se ontroue en sondige mense, sal Ek, die

Seun van die Mens, My ook vir jou skaam wanneer Ek terugkeer met die heilige engele, beklee met die heerlikheid van my Vader.”

Ses dae later neem Jesus vir Petrus en Jakobus en sy broer Johannes saam met Hom en vat hulle teen ’n hoë berg uit waar hulle alleen was. En daar, terwyl hulle na Jesus kyk, het sy voorkoms verander. Sy gesig het begin straal soos die son. Sy klere het skitterwit geword.

Toe het twee mans, Moses en Elia, verskyn en met Jesus begin praat. Hulle was glansryk in voorkoms. Hulle het met Jesus gepraat oor hoe Hy God se plan sal volvoer deur in Jerusalem te sterf.

Petrus sê daarop vir Jesus: “Leermeester, dis wonderlik om hier te wees! Kom ons bou drie skuilings: vir U een, vir Moses een en een vir Elia.” Eintlik het hy nie geweet wat om te sê nie, want hulle het groot geskrik.

Maar terwyl hy nog praat, oordek ’n helder glansende wolk hulle, en daar kom ’n stem uit die wolk wat sê: “Hy is my geliefde Seun. Hy is ’n Kind so na my hart. Doen wat Hy vir julle sê.”

Toe hulle dit hoor, het die dissipels plat op die grond neergeval. Hulle het groot geskrik. Daarop kom Jesus na hulle toe en sit sy hand gerusstellend op hulle: “Staan gerus maar op; moenie bang wees nie.”

Toe hulle van die berg af gaan, het Jesus hulle beveel: “Julle moet vir niemand vertel wat julle gesien het totdat Ek, die Seun van die Mens, uit die dood opgestaan het nie.” Hulle het dit toe vir hulleself gehou, maar hulle het onder mekaar bly redekawel oor wat hierdie “opstaan uit die dood” waarvan Jesus praat, beteken.

Toe hulle weer by die ander dissipels terugkom, sien hulle ’n groot klomp mense om hulle en skrifkenners wat met hulle argumenteer. Net toe al die baie mense Jesus sien, het hulle Hom verras tegemoet gehardloop en begroet.

Hulle het toe daarvandaan vertrek en deur Galilea gereis. Jesus wou dit egter nie rugbaar laat word nie, want Hy wou tyd hê om sy dissipels te onderrig. Sy woorde aan hulle was: “Die Seun van die Mens gaan aan die mag van mense oorgegee word. Hulle sal Hom doodmaak, maar ná drie dae sal Hy opstaan.” Hulle het dit nie verstaan nie, maar was te bang om Hom daaroor uit te vra.

Onthou jy vir koning Dawid en koning Salomo? Al die groot konings van antieke Israel was krygsmanne, bouers en diplomate. Geen wonder die meeste mense, as hulle in 'n komende Messias geglo het, het hulle voorgestel die nuwe koning moet 'n grootse krygsmann, bouer en verlosser van almal wees nie. Hoe vreemd dan dat Jesus blykbaar onverskillig voorgekom het oor die bewindsverandering. Sy boodskap was: "Maak julle harte oop vir God." Hy het nie 'n geheime voorraad wapens bymekaargemaak of 'n kommando afgerig om die Romeinse bewind omver te gooi nie. Hierdie onverwagse fokus, tesame met Jesus se aandrang op opregte persoonlike berou het baie mense in Jerusalem se godsdienstige kringe aanstoot gegee. Sommige geleerde Fariseërs het gevoel Hy leer die mense gevaarlike en misleidende filosofieë. Te midde van toenemende Joodse teenstand en gewildheid onder die gewone mense, het Jesus na Jerusalem gegaan om een van die grootste Joodse vakansies, die Fees van die Tabernakels, te gaan vier. Hy het die fees gebruik as die agtergrond waarteen Hy sy outoriteit, identiteit en sending bekend sou maak.

Die Jode het by die fees na Jesus gesoek en gevra: "Waar is daardie man?"

Daar was onder die skare sommer baie bespiegeling oor Jesus. Sommige het gesê dat Hy 'n goeie mens is.

Ander het nie saamgestem nie, maar gesê dat Hy die skare mislei. Niemand het egter openlik oor Hom gepraat nie, uit vrees vir die Joodse leiers.

Halfpad deur die feesvierings het Jesus na die tempel toe gegaan en mense onderrig. Die Joodse leiers was erg ontsteld en het gesê: "Hoe is dit dat hierdie man soveel geleerdheid het alhoewel hy nie studeer het nie?"

Sommige van die inwoners van Jerusalem het opgemerk: "Is hy nie die persoon wat hulle soek om dood te maak nie? Kyk net, hy is besig om in die openbaar te praat en hulle sê niks teen hom nie. Het die leiers nie miskien tereg tot die besef gekom dat hy die Messias is nie? Maar hoe is dit moontlik? Ons weet mos waar hierdie man vandaan kom; wanneer die Messias ook al kom, weet niemand waarvandaan Hy kom nie."

Terwyl Jesus besig was om in die tempel onderrig te gee, het Hy uitgeroep en gesê: "Julle ken My en julle weet waarvandaan Ek kom! Tog het Ek nie uit my eie gekom nie, maar dit is die ware Een wat My

gestuur het. Hom herken julle nie. Ek ken Hom omdat Ek van Hom af kom en Hy My gestuur het.”

Hulle het toe pogings aangewend om Hom te arresteer, maar niemand het 'n hand op Hom gelê nie omdat sy tyd nog nie gekom het nie. Baie mense uit die skare het in Hom begin glo en gesê: “Wanneer die Messias ook al kom, sal Hy sekerlik nie méér wondertekens doen as wat hierdie man gedoen het nie.”

Op die laaste dag, die groot dag van die Huttefees, het Jesus daar gestaan en uitgeroep: “As jy dors is, kom dan na My toe en drink. Die een wat in My glo – soos die Skrif sê: ‘Riviere lewende water sal uit sy binneste vloei.’” Dit het Jesus gesê oor die Gees wat die mense wat in Hom glo, sou ontvang. Want die Gees was nog nie daar nie omdat Jesus nog nie verheerlik was nie.

Die mense uit die skare wat hierdie woorde gehoor het, het opgemerk: “Hierdie man is regtig die Profeet.”

Ander het gesê: “Hierdie man is die Messias.”

En nog ander het gesê: “Die Messias kom tog nie uit Galilea nie? Het die Skrif dan nie gesê dat die Messias uit die nageslag van Dawid en uit Betlehem, die tuisdorp van Dawid, sou kom nie?” Onder die skare het daar toe verdeeldheid oor Jesus gekom. Sommige van die mense het Hom selfs probeer arresteer, maar niemand het aan Hom geraak nie.

Wanneer Jesus gepreek het, het Hy baie dinge gesê waarmee mense 'n probleem gehad het. Hy het gesê Hy is die lig – maar net God is die bron van lig. Hy was van bo af – maar net God woon in die hemel. Jesus het die duidelike en beslissende keuse uitgestippel: glo in Hom en ken God se krag in jou lewe, of bly in geestelike duisternis. Die boodskap sou alles verander.

Verder, by 'n ander geleentheid, het Jesus vir die mense gesê: “Ek is die lig vir die mensdom. Wie My aanhou volg, sal nooit in die duisternis leef nie, maar sal die lig hê wat lewe gee.”

Die Fariseërs het toe vir Hom gesê: “Jy getuig oor jouself; daarom is jou getuienis nie geldig nie.”

Jesus het reageer: “As Ek oor Myself getuig, is my getuienis geldig omdat Ek weet waarvandaan Ek gekom het en waarheen Ek teruggaan. Julle weet egter nie waarvandaan Ek kom of waarheen Ek gaan nie.”

Verder het Jesus vir hulle gesê: “Ek gaan weg en julle sal My soek, maar julle sal in julle sonde doodgaan. Waarheen Ek gaan, kan julle nie nou kom nie.”

Die Jode het reageer: “Hy gaan tog nie Homself om die lewe bring nie – omdat Hy sê: ‘Waarheen Ek gaan, kan julle nie kom nie?’”

Toe het Hy vir hulle gesê: “Julle is van hieronder. Ek is van daarbo. Julle het julle oorsprong uit hierdie wêreld; Ek het my oorsprong nie uit hierdie wêreld nie. Daarom het Ek vir julle gesê dat julle sal sterf in julle sondes, want as julle nie glo dat Ek is wat Ek is nie, sal julle in julle sondes doodgaan.”

Terwyl Jesus hierdie dinge gesê het, het daar baie mense in Hom geglo.

Toe het Jesus vir die Jode wat tot geloof in Hom gekom het, gesê: “As julle in ’n noue verbintenis aan my boodskap leef, is julle my egte navolgers; en julle sal begryp wat die waarheid beteken, en die waarheid sal julle vrymaak.

“Ek verseker julle, as iemand my boodskap gehoorsaam, sal hy so nimmer as te nooit sterf nie.”

Die Jode se reaksie was: “Nou weet ons verseker dat jy in die mag van ’n bese gees is. Abraham en die profete het reeds gesterf; nietemin sê jy: ‘As iemand my boodskap gehoorsaam, sal hy so nimmer as te nooit sterf nie.’ Jy is tog nie groter as ons vader Abraham wat reeds gesterf het nie? En die profete is ook reeds dood. As wie bied jy jouself aan?”

Jesus het geantwoord: “As Ek Myself verheerlik, is my heerlikheid niks werd nie. Dit is my Vader wat My verheerlik, oor Wie julle sê: ‘Hy is ons God,’ maar julle ken Hom nie. Ek ken Hom. As Ek sê: ‘Ek ken Hom nie,’ sal Ek net soos julle ’n leuenaar wees. Maar Ek ken Hom en Ek gehoorsaam sy woorde. Abraham, julle voorvader, het met uitbundige blydschap uitgesien na my dag; en hy het dit gesien en was verheug.”

Die Jode het toe reageer: “Jy is nog nie eers 50 jaar oud nie en jy het Abraham gesien?”

Jesus het vir hulle gesê: “Ek verseker julle, nog voordat Abraham bestaan het, was Ek al wat Ek is.” Hulle het toe klippe opgetel om Hom daarmee dood te gooi. Jesus het hulle egter ontwyk en uit die tempelgebied padgegee.

Daar het jy dit. Jesus het vir die mense gesê Hy het bestaan al van

voordat Abraham gebore is. Hy het vir die skare gesê sy lewe het nie 'n begin gehad nie. Hy het vir die skare gesê Hy is God. Die skare het in 'n oproer gekom. Raadgewers sou dalk vir Jesus aangemoedig het om die godsdienstige leiers kans te gee om af te koel, maar Jesus was onkeerbaar. Hy is gedryf deur 'n passie om vir die mense God se heerlikheid te wys, en selfs toe 'n goeie vriend siek en op die dood se drumpel gestaan het, het Hy die geleentheid gebruik as nog 'n voorbeeld van God se krag.

'n Sekere man met die naam Lasarus was siek. Hy was van Betanië, die tuisdorpie van Maria en haar suster Marta. Dit was Maria wat die Here met aromatiese olie gesalf het en toe sy voete met haar hare afgedroog het. Dit is haar broer Lasarus wat siek was. Die susters het toe iemand na Jesus toe gestuur om te sê: “Here, kyk, hy vir wie U lief is, is siek.”

Jesus het die boodskap gehoor en gesê: “Hierdie siekte gaan nie op die dood uitloop nie, maar vind plaas om die heerlikheid van God sigbaar te maak sodat die Seun van God daardeur verheerlik word.”

Jesus was lief vir Marta, haar suster en vir Lasarus. Toe Jesus gehoor het dat Lasarus siek is, het Hy nog twee dae oorgebly op die plek waar Hy was. Eers hierna het Hy vir sy dissipels gesê: “Laat ons weer 'n keer Judea toe gaan.”

Die dissipels sê toe vir Jesus: “Rabbi, laas wou die Jode daar U nog stenig, en U gaan wêér soontoe?”

Jesus het geantwoord: “Is daar nie twaalf werksure gedurende 'n dag nie? As iemand in die daglig rondloop, struikel hy nie omdat hy die lig van hierdie wêreld sien. As iemand egter in die nag rondloop, struikel hy maklik omdat hy nie lig het nie.”

Hierdie dinge het Jesus gesê, en daarna bygevoeg: “Ons vriend Lasarus slaap, maar Ek gaan om hom wakker te maak.”

Die dissipels het vir Jesus gesê: “Meneer, as hy slaap, sal hy mos gesond word.” Jesus het Lasarus se dood bedoel, maar hulle het gedink Hy praat van die natuurlike slaap.

Toe sê Jesus reguit vir hulle: “Lasarus is dood, maar ter wille van julle is Ek bly dat Ek nie daar was nie sodat julle kan glo. Laat ons dan na hom toe gaan.”

Tomas, wat ook Didimus genoem is, het vir die ander dissipels gesê: “Laat ons ook gaan sodat ons saam met Jesus kan sterf.”

Toe Jesus daar aankom, het Hy uitgevind dat Lasarus al vier dae in die graf was. Betanië was naby Jerusalem, ongeveer drie kilometer daarvandaan. Baie van die Jode het by Marta en Maria opgedaag om

hulle meegevoel oor hulle broer te betuig. Toe Marta hoor dat Jesus op pad is, het sy Hom gaan ontmoet. Maria het egter in die huis bly sit.

Marta het vir Jesus gesê: “Here, as U maar net hier was, sou my broer nie gesterf het nie. Maar selfs nou nog weet ek dat God aan U sal gee wat U Hom ook al vra.”

Jesus sê vir haar: “Jou broer sal weer opstaan.”

Marta het dadelik reageer: “Ek weet dat hy weer sal opstaan met die opstanding op die laaste dag.”

Jesus het vir haar gesê: “Ek is die opstanding en die lewe. Wie in My glo, sal lewe, al sterf hy ook. Elkeen wat lewe en in My glo, sal in alle ewigheid nooit sterf nie. Glo jy dit, Marta?”

Sy sê vir Hom: “Ja, Here, ek is vas oortuig dat U die Messias is, die Seun van God, Hy wat na die wêreld toe sou kom.”

Nadat sy dit gesê het, het sy teruggegaan en haar suster Maria gaan roep en stilletjies vir Maria gesê: “Die Leermeester is hier, en Hy roep jou.” Toe sy dit hoor, het Maria gou-gou opgestaan en na Jesus toe gegaan. Jesus het toe nog nie in die dorpie aangekom nie, maar was steeds op die plek waar Marta Hom ontmoet het. Die Jode wat saam met Maria in die huis was om met haar te simpatiseer, het gesien dat sy so vinnig opstaan en uitgaan. Hulle het haar gevolg omdat hulle gedink het sy is op pad graf toe om daar te gaan treur.

Toe Maria aankom waar Jesus nog was, en sy Hom sien, het sy by sy voete neergeval en vir Hom gesê: “Here, as U hier was, sou my broer nie gesterf het nie!”

Toe Jesus sien dat sy huil en dat die Jode wat saam met haar gekom het, ook huil, het Hy bewoë geraak en was diep ontsteld. Hy sê toe: “Waar het julle hom neergelê?”

Hulle antwoord: “Here, kom kyk.”

Jesus begin toe huil.

Die Jode sê toe: “Kyk net hoe lief was hy vir Lasarus!”

Sommige van die omstanders het gesê: “Was hierdie man wat die oë van die blinde oopgemaak het, dan nie ook in staat om te keer dat Lasarus sterf nie?”

Jesus het weer bewoë geword toe Hy by die graf kom. Die graf was ’n grot en ’n klip was voor die opening gerol. Jesus sê toe: “Rol die klip weg.”

Maar Marta, Lasarus se suster, sê vir Jesus: “Meneer, hy ruik seker reeds, want dit is die vierde dag.”

Jesus sê toe vir haar: “Het Ek nie vir jou gesê dat as jy glo, jy die

heerlikheid van God sal sien nie?”

Daarop het hulle die klip weggerol. Jesus het sy oë hemelwaarts gerig en gesê: “Vader, Ek is dankbaar teenoor U dat U na My geluister het. Ek weet dat U altyd na My luister, tog het Ek dit gesê ter wille van die skare wat hier rondom ons staan, dat hulle kan glo dat U My gestuur het.”

Nadat Hy dit gesê het, het Hy met ’n kragtige stem uitgeroep: “Lasarus, kom uit!” Die dooie het uitgekóm, sy voete en hande nog toegedraai in doeke en sy gesig nog verbind met ’n kopdoek.

Jesus sê vir hulle: “Maak die doeke los en laat hom gaan.”

Baie van die Jode wat na Maria toe gekom en gesien het wat Jesus gedoen het, het in Hom begin glo. Sommige van hulle het egter na die Fariseërs toe gegaan en by hulle gaan skinder oor wat Jesus gedoen het.

Die priesterhoofde en die Fariseërs het toe die Sanhedrin bymekaargeroep en gesê: “Wat gaan ons doen? Hierdie man hou aan om baie wondertekens te doen. As ons hom maar net so laat begaan, sal almal in hom glo en dan sal die Romeine kom en die tempel en ons nasie tot niet maak.”

Een van hulle, Kajafas, wat hoofpriester was gedurende daardie jaar, het opgemerk: “Julle is baie kortsigtig. Julle besef nie dat dit vir julle voordeliger is dat een mens vir die volk sterf en nie die hele volk tot niet gaan nie.”

Dit het hy nie uit sy eie gesê nie, maar aangesien hy gedurende daardie jaar hoofpriester was, het hy geprofeteer dat Jesus ter wille van die nasie sou sterf. En nie net ter wille van die nasie alleen nie, maar ook om die kinders van God wat oor die wêreld verspreid is, tot ’n eenheid bymekaar te bring. Van daardie dag af het hulle planne gesmee om Hom dood te maak.

Gewoonlik probeer mense moeilikheid vermy, tog peil Jesus direk af op die mense wat Hom wou doodmaak. Jerusalem is die plek waar die Paasfees gevier is. Die mense daar moes sy boodskap hoor. Daar was min tyd oor. Jesus sou Jerusalem binnekort vir die laaste keer binnegaan.

Ouers het hulle kindertjies na Jesus toe gebring sodat Hy hulle kon aanraak en seën, maar sy dissipels het hulle daarvoor aangespreek. Toe Jesus dit sien, was Hy verontwaardig en het vir hulle gesê: “Laat die kindertjies toe om na My toe te kom. Moenie hulle keer nie. Want God se koninkryk is juis bedoel vir almal wat soos hulle is. Ek verseker

julle, wie God se koninkryk nie soos 'n kindjie ontvang nie, sal beslis nie daar ingaan nie.” Toe het Hy sy arms om die kindertjies gesit, sy hande op hulle koppe gelê en hulle geseën.

Toe Jesus weer op pad was, hardloop iemand Hom tegemoet, val voor Hom op sy knieë en vra Hom: “Goeie leermeester, wat moet ek doen om die ewige lewe te verkry?”

“Waarom noem jy My goed?” het Jesus hom gevra. “Net God is werklik goed. Maar wat jou vraag betref – jy ken die gebooie: ‘Jy mag nie moord pleeg nie; jy mag nie egbreuk pleeg nie; jy mag nie steel nie; jy mag nie vals getuienis gee nie; jy mag niemand benadeel nie; respekteer jou pa en ma.’”

“Leermeester,” was sy reaksie, “ek het al hierdie gebooie van my kinderdae af nagekom.”

Jesus het hom aandagtig aangekyk en liefgekry. “Jy kom net een iets kort,” het Hy vir hom gesê. “Gaan verkoop alles wat jy het en gee die geld vir die armes. Dan sal jy 'n skat in die hemel hê. Kom dan en word my volgeling.”

Hy was heeltemal verslae en het ontsteld weggegaan, want hy het baie besittings gehad.

Jesus het toe rondgekyk en vir sy dissipels gesê: “Hoe moeilik is dit nie vir ryk mense om in God se koninkryk te kom nie!”

Sy dissipels was verbaas hieroor. Jesus reageer toe en sê weer vir hulle: “Kinders, dit is bitter moeilik om in die koninkryk van God te kom. Dit is makliker vir 'n kameel om deur 'n naald se oog te kom as vir 'n ryke om in God se koninkryk te kom.”

Die dissipels was heeltemal verbysterd hieroor en het vir mekaar gesê: “As dit só is, wie kan dan verlos word?”

Jesus het hulle aangekyk en gesê: “Menslik gesproke is dit onmoontlik, maar tog nie by God nie. Alles is by God moontlik!”

Petrus begin toe ophaal wat hulle alles opgeoffer het: “U besef dat ons alles agter gelaat het om U te volg.”

Daarop het Jesus geantwoord: “Ek verseker julle, elkeen wat 'n huis of broers of susters of ma of pa of kinders of eiendom ter wille van My en die Goeie Nuus prysgegee het, sal in hierdie tyd honderd maal soveel aan huise en broers en susters en ma's en kinders en eiendom ontvang; ook nog vervolging, maar in God se nuwe wêreld die ewige lewe! Baie wat nou so vernaam lyk, sal eendag heeltemal onbelangrik wees. En dié wat nou nie gereken word nie, sal eendag die belangrikste wees.”

Hulle was nou op pad na Jerusalem. Jesus het voor hulle uitgeloop,

en sy dissipels was vol angs. Ook die mense wat agter hulle aangekom het, was met vrees vervul. Jesus het weer die twaalf eenkant geneem en vir hulle begin vertel wat met Hom sou gebeur: “Luister nou goed. As ons in Jerusalem kom, sal Ek, die Seun van die Mens, uitgelewer word aan die priesterhoofde en die skrifkenners. Hulle sal My tot die dood veroordeel. En hulle sal My uitlewer aan die nie-Jode. Hulle sal My bespot en op My spoeg; hulle sal My gésel en doodmaak. Maar ná drie dae sal Ek opstaan.”

Die Paasfees van die Jode was naby. Baie mense het van die platteland af na Jerusalem toe gegaan met die doel om hulleself voor die begin van die fees ritueel te gaan was. Hulle het toe vir Jesus daar rond gesoek en waar hulle in die tempel gestaan het, vir mekaar gesê: “Wat dink julle, Hy sal tog sekerlik nie Fees toe kom nie?” Die priesterhoofde en die Fariseërs het intussen reeds opdragte uitgevaardig dat as iemand weet waar Jesus Hom bevind, hy die inligting moes deurgee sodat hulle Hom kon arresteer.

Hoeveel keer het Jesus vir sy volgelinge gesê om nie te sê wie Hy is nie, om te wag? En hulle het gewag. Nou was die wag verby. Toe Jesus by Jerusalem ingaan, het Hy die mense toegelaat om te juig. Hy het geweet wat die week vir Hom inhou, maar vir die oomblik kon almal wat Hom liefhet, juig en feesvier.

Toe hulle naby Jerusalem kom, het Jesus en sy dissipels eers die dorpies Betfage en Betanië, wat teen die Olyfberg lê, bereik. Daarop het Hy twee van sy dissipels vooruit gestuur met die opdrag: “Gaan na die dorpie hier reg voor julle en nes julle daar ingaan, sal julle ’n jong donkie wat nog nooit gery is nie, vasmag sien staan. Maak dit los en bring dit hierheen. As iemand vir julle sê: ‘Wat maak julle daar?’ sê dan: ‘Die Here het die donkie nodig; Hy sal hom nou-nou terugstuur.’”

Die twee dissipels het toe vertrek en hulle het ’n jong donkie gekry wat buite in die straat by die ingang van ’n huis vasmag staan. Terwyl hulle hom losmaak, het van die omstanders beswaar gemaak en vir hulle gesê: “Wat dink julle doen julle? Hoe kan julle die donkie sommerso losmaak?” Hulle het toe geantwoord soos Jesus hulle beveel het, en die mense het hulle toe laat begaan. Daarna bring hulle die jong donkie na Jesus toe. Hulle sit toe hulle bo-klere op die donkie en Jesus gaan sit op hom.

Baie van die skare het toe hulle bo-klere op die pad voor Jesus oopgegooi, ander weer groen takkies wat hulle in die veld gekap het.

Met Jesus in die middel van die optog het hulle uitgeroep:

“Prys God!”

“Geseënd is die Een wat kom in die Here se Naam!”

“Geseënd is die koningsheerskappy van ons voorvader Dawid wat aan die kom is!”

“Prys God in die hoogste hemel!”

Toe Hy Jerusalem binnegaan, was die hele stad in beroering. Hulle het gevra: “Wie is hierdie man?”

Die skare het geantwoord: “Hy is Jesus, die profeet uit Nasaret in Galilea.”

Jesus het tempel toe gegaan en al die handelaars en hulle kliënte uitgejaag. Hy het die tafels van die bankiers en die hokkies van die duiweverkopers onderstebo gegooi en vir hulle gesê: “Daar staan in die Skrif geskryf: ‘My huis is bedoel om ’n huis van gebed te wees, maar julle het daarvan ’n rowersnes gemaak.’”

Blinde en verlamde mense het daar op die tempelterrein na Hom toe gekom en Hy het hulle gesond gemaak. Maar toe die hoofpriesters en die skrifkenners die merkwaardige dinge sien wat Hy doen en hoor hoe selfs die kinders in die tempel uitroep: “Prys God vir die Seun van Dawid,” was hulle bitterlik ontsteld en het vir Jesus gesê: “Hoor jy wat sê hulle daar?”

“Ja,” was Jesus se antwoord. “Het julle nog nooit in die Skrif gelees: ‘U het kinders en babatjies geleer om u lof te besing’ nie?”

Toe is Hy weer daar weg en Hy het uit die stad na Betanië toe gegaan, waar Hy oornag het.

Jesus het ’n groot deel van sy laaste week in die tempel deurgebring en mense geleer. Rabbi’s het gewoonlik in die tempel of sinagoges onderrig gegee. Maar hierdie rabbi was anders. Hierdie rabbi het alles verander deur te insinueer dat die Messias, die een groter as selfs Dawid, nou met hulle gepraat het. Niemand het nog ooit so gepraat nie. Niemand het dit gewaag nie.

Later, toe Jesus besig was om die mense by die tempel te onderrig, het Hy die volgende vraag gestel: “Hoe is dit dan dat die skrifkenners beweer dat die Messias die seun van Dawid is? Dawid het tog self deur die Heilige Gees gesê:

‘Die HERE het vir my Here gesê:

Sit aan my regterhand

totdat Ek jou vyande

heeltemal aan jou onderwerp het.’

“Dawid noem Hom tog self Here. Hoe kan Hy terselfdertyd sy seun wees?”

Die groot skare het dit geniet om na Hom te luister.

Die skare het van Jesus gehou, maar die godsdienstige leiers se haat het al meer toegeneem. Jesus was so menslik dat toe sy situasie erger geraak het, Hy bekommerd geraak het. Maar Jesus het sy vrees in die oë gekyk en geweier dat dit Hom keer om die wil van God te doen.

“Nou is Ek hewig ontsteld. En wat moet Ek sê? Moet Ek sê: ‘Vader, red My uit hierdie uur’? Tog het Ek juis vir hierdie uur gekom. Vader, verheerlik ú Naam!”

Toe het daar ’n stem uit die hemel gekom: “Ek het dit alreeds verheerlik, en Ek sal dit weer verheerlik.” Die skare wat daar rondgestaan en dit gehoor het, het beweer dat daar ’n groot donderslag was. Ander het gesê: “’n Engel het met hom gepraat.”

Toe reageer Jesus: “Hierdie stem was nie ter wille van My nie, maar ter wille van julle. Nou vind die oordeel oor hierdie wêreld plaas; nou sal die leier van hierdie wêreld na buite toe uitgedryf word. En wanneer Ek van die aarde af aan die kruis verhoog word, sal Ek almal na My toe trek.” Dit het Jesus gesê en terselfdertyd aangedui watter soort dood Hy sou sterf.

Ten spyte van só baie wondertekens wat Jesus voor die mense se oë gedoen het, het hulle volgehou om nie in Hom te glo nie.

Nietemin het baie uit die geledere van die leiers in Hom begin glo, maar vanweë die Fariseërs het hulle dit nie in die openbaar bely nie sodat hulle nie uit die sinagoge geban sou word nie. Hulle het die verering deur mense liever gehad as die verering deur God.

Toe het Jesus uitgeroep: “Iemand wat in My glo, glo nie net in My nie, maar ook in Hom wat My gestuur het. En wie na My kyk, sien ook vir Hom wat My gestuur het. Ek het as lig na die wêreld toe gekom sodat elkeen wat in My glo, nie langer in die duisternis sou bly nie.

“As iemand dan ook nog na my woorde luister en dit nie

gehoorsaam nie, veroordeel Ek hom nie sommer nie, want Ek het nie gekom om die mensdom te veroordeel nie, maar om die mensdom te verlos. Wie My verwerp en nie my woorde aanvaar nie, het reeds homself geoordeel; die boodskap wat Ek uitdra, sal hom op die laaste dag veroordeel. Ek het nie uit my eie gepraat nie, maar die Vader wat My gestuur het, het aan My 'n opdrag gegee oor wat Ek moet sê en wat Ek sal verkondig. En Ek weet dat sy opdrag die ewige lewe inhou. Dit wat Ek dus sê, verkondig Ek net soos die Vader dit aan My oorgedra het.”

Dit was twee dae voor die Paasfees en die Fees van die Ongesuurde Brood. Die priesterhoofde en die skrifkenners was nog op soek na 'n geleentheid om Jesus in die geheim te vang en dood te maak. Want hulle het saamgestem: “Nie in die openbaar terwyl die skares feesvier nie; anders ontstaan daar oproer onder die volk.”

Agter die skerms, sonder dat politieke of godsdienstige howe daarvan bewus was, het daar 'n donker mag gebroei en gewag. Daardie bose mag het 'n gaping gevind tussen Jesus se intiemste volgelinge. Net 'n bietjie gierigheid is al wat die mag nodig gehad het om die plot vinnig vorentoe te laat beweeg.

Satan het in Judas ingevaar wat Iskariot genoem is, een van die twaalf. Hy het toe weggegaan om te onderhandel met die priesterhoofde en die bevelvoerders van die tempelwag oor hoe hy Jesus aan hulle sou uitlewer. Hulle was opgewonde en het ooreengekom om geld aan hom te gee. Judas het ten volle ingestem en na 'n gunstige geleentheid gesoek om Jesus uit te lewer waar die skares nie teenwoordig is nie.

26

The Hour of Darkness

ON THE FIRST DAY of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to

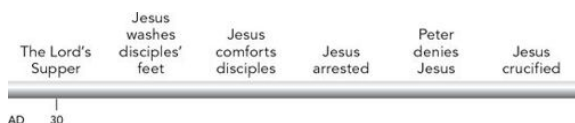
eat the Passover?”

So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve.

Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.



The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

“Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, “Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”

His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved,¹ was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, “Ask him which one he means.”

Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?”

Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

After Judas left, Jesus gave the disciples a glimpse of what was to come. He foreshadowed the fact that he was going to be “broken” and

“poured out”—he was going to take humanity’s punishment for sin on himself.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Jesus warned his disciples that he would be with them only a little while longer. He went on to comfort his confused followers.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever

believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

“A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Perhaps they sang a hymn from Psalms 115–118, the traditional psalms sung as part of the Passover meal. “The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion ... Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever ... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” What were the disciples thinking and feeling as they followed Jesus to the Mount of Olives? They had probably gone to this place with him many times before for prayer and conversation. But now, shadows too dark for them to comprehend were beginning to fall on their hopes and dreams.

Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written:

“I will strike the shepherd,
and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed,

“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.

“I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

Again he asked them, “Who is it you want?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” they said.

Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: “I have not lost one of those you gave me.”

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.)

Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”

And he touched the man’s ear and healed him.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour — when darkness reigns.”

Soldiers of the Jewish religious establishment had come to place Jesus under arrest, and Jesus gave himself up. He could topple his foes with a word. He had the power to call on vast armies of angels to rescue him, but instead he surrendered. The disciples knew something very bad was happening, and they ran away to save their own skins. Jesus was left alone with his captors.

Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”

Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going

to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God."

"You have said so," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.

Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?"

Peter was not the timid sort. His normal reaction to trouble was to wrestle it to the ground, not to run from it. Quite naturally, then, he was the one to follow the soldiers back to the high priest's house and wait for the outcome. Maybe he was dreaming up "Plan B" when a few people took him by surprise.

And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him."

But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said.

A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them."

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied.

About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean."

Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked

straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. So they bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

“What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.”

So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

The Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate, who had governed the region of Judea for Rome for four years. Historical records reveal that he was no friend of the Jews. He frequently ordered soldiers to beat and kill Jewish protestors, and he had no compunction about offending Jewish leaders by placing symbols of pagan Roman worship in Jerusalem. On this Friday morning of Passover week, the Jewish leaders asked him to judge Jesus as a subversive threat. Now Pilate was caught. If he refused to condemn Jesus, Jewish accusers would portray him as no friend of Caesar (a very dangerous public image). If he agreed to crucify Jesus, he’d be acting against his own judicial instincts and, perhaps worse, caving in to those he despised. He needed to question this prisoner himself.

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”

“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants

would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

“What is truth?” retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him. But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews’?”

They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!” Now Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe and went up to him again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they slapped him in the face.

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews gathered there, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.” When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “Here is the man!”

As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!”

But Pilate answered, “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.”

The Jewish leaders insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify

you?"

Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."

When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha). It was the day of Preparation of the Passover; it was about noon.

"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.

But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

Finally Pilate handed him over to them to be crucified.

So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.

As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Roman crucifixion was a cruel punishment. Nailed to a wooden cross by wrists and feet, it was an excruciating, slow and very public way to die. The victim's groaning became a morning's entertainment for onlookers. Seeing the horrors of crucifixion was an effective deterrent for wrong-doers. For Jesus, this heinous death was undeserved. As he gave his life, he looked beyond it to God's bigger story of salvation that was being played out through his life and death.

Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in

three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!”

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.”

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals — one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

There was a written notice above him, which read: **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her,

“Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

For those made to suffer crucifixion, death itself was the only resolution. So Jesus waited that day, along with two other victims and a crowd of onlookers, for death to overcome him. Before that, however, a deeper pain was coming. A pain that went far beyond the nails in his feet and wrists, the labored breathing or the “crown” of thorns puncturing his brow. God poured out humanity’s rightful punishment for sin upon his Son. And even the physical elements trembled.

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eli, lema sabachthani?*” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely he was the Son of God!”

When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

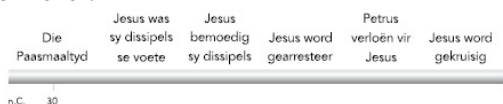
1Disciple whom Jesus loved: Probably John.

Die uur van duisternis

Op die eerste dag van die Fees van die Ongesuurde Brood – die dag waarop hulle die paaslammers geslag het – sê Jesus se dissipels vir Hom: “Waar wil U hê moet ons vir U die paasete gaan voorberei?”

Hy stuur toe twee van sy dissipels met die opdrag: “Gaan stad toe. Daar sal julle ’n man sien wat ’n kruik water dra. Gaan agter hom aan en waar hy indraai, moet julle vir die huiseienaar sê: ‘Die Leermeester vra: Waar is die gastekamer waar Ek die Paasfees saam met my dissipels kan geniet?’ Dan sal hy vir julle ’n groot bovertrek wys wat klaar gereed staan. Dáár kan julle vir ons die maaltyd voorberei.”

Toe het die twee vooruit gegaan stad toe, en hulle het alles presies gekry soos Jesus vir hulle gesê het. En hulle het die paasmaaltyd voorberei.



Sien "Tydlyn van DIE STORIE"

Teen die aand het Jesus toe saam met die twaalf dissipels daar aangekom.

Voor die viering van die paasmaaltyd het Jesus reeds geweet dat sy tyd aangebreek het om van hierdie wêreld af na die Vader toe oor te gaan. Jesus was lief vir sy eie mense wat in die wêreld gewoon het. Hy het hulle enduit liefgehad.

Gedurende die aandete het die duiwel alreeds ’n saadjie in die hart van Judas, die seun van Simon Iskariot, geplant om Jesus uit te lewer. Jesus het geweet dat die Vader alles tot sy beskikking gestel het, en dat Hy van God gekom het en weer na God teruggaan. Hy het toe van die tafel af opgestaan, sy bo-klere uitgetrek, ’n doek gevat en dit om Hom vasgebind. Daarna het Hy water in ’n wasskottel gegooi en begin om die dissipels se voete te was en af te droog met die doek wat om Hom vasgebind was.

Hy kom toe by Simon Petrus, wat vir Hom sê: “Here, gaan U my voete was?”

Jesus antwoord hom: “Wat Ek besig is om te doen, verstaan jy nie

nou nie, maar wanneer alles verby is, sal jy dit verstaan.”

Petrus se onmiddellike reaksie was: “U sal tot in ewigheid nooit my voete was nie!”

Jesus antwoord hom: “As Ek jou nie was nie, het jy nie deel aan My nie.”

Simon Petrus vra Jesus toe: “Here, dan nie net my voete nie, maar ook my hande en kop.”

Jesus sê vir hom: “Iemand wat klaar gebad het, is heeltemal skoon, behalwe om nog sy voete te was. En julle is mos reeds skoon – nee, tog nie almal nie.” Jesus het goed geweet wie Hom sou uitlewer; daarom het Hy gesê: “Julle is nie almal skoon nie.”

Nadat Jesus hulle voete klaar gewas het, het Hy sy bo-klere aangetrek en weer aangelê by die ete. Hy sê toe vir hulle: “Verstaan julle wat Ek vir julle gedoen het? Julle noem My Leerreester en Here, en tereg só, want Ek is dit. As Ek dan, wat julle Here en Leerreester is, julle voete gewas het, moet julle ook mekaar se voete was. Ek het vir julle ’n voorbeeld gestel, en soos Ek vir julle gedoen het, moet julle ook doen. Hoe waar is dit tog nie: ’n Slaaf is nie belangriker as sy eienaar nie en ’n gestuurde ook nie belangriker as die een wat hom gestuur het nie. As julle hierdie dinge insien en julle eie maak, sal julle geseënd wees as julle dit ook doen.”

Nadat Jesus dit gesê het, het Hy erg ontsteld geword en openlik verklaar: “Ek verseker julle, een van julle wat hier is, gaan My uitlewer.”

Die dissipels het na mekaar gekyk, onseker oor wie Hy bedoel. Een van Jesus se dissipels het langs Hom aan tafel aangelê – die liefingdissipel. Simon Petrus knik toe vir hom dat hy moet vra wie dit is van wie Jesus praat.

Hy het toe agteroor geleun tot na aan Jesus se bors en vir Hom gevra: “Here, wie is dit?”

Jesus reageer daarop: “Dit is dié een vir wie Ek ’n stukkie brood in die sous sal doop en vir hom gee.” Hy vat toe ’n stukkie brood, doop dit in die sous en gee dit aan Judas, seun van Simon Iskariot. Ná die stukkie brood het Satan van hom besit geneem.

Toe sê Jesus vir hom: “Wat jy doen, moet jy gou afhandel!” Niemand wat aan tafel was, het geweet om watter rede Hy dit vir Judas gesê het nie. Sommige het inderdaad gedink, terwyl Judas die beursie dra, dat Jesus vir hom gesê het: “Gaan koop wat ons nodig het vir die paasete,” of dat hy soos gebruiklik iets aan die armes moes gaan gee. Net nadat Judas die stukkie brood aanvaar het, het hy

dadelik vertrek. Dit was nag.

Nadat Judas geloop het, het Jesus vir die dissipels 'n kykie gegee op wat die toekoms inhou. Hy het daarop gewys dat Hy “gebreek” en “vergiet” sal word – Hy sou die mensdom se straf op homself neem.

Terwyl hulle besig was om te eet, neem Jesus brood en vra God se seën daarop. Toe breek Hy dit in stukke en gee dit aan sy dissipels met die woorde: “Neem en eet dit. Dit is my liggaam.”

En Hy het die beker geneem en God daarvoor gedank. Hy het dit aan hulle gegee met die woorde: “Drink almal daaruit, want dit is my bloed wat die verbond tussen God en sy volk verseël. Dit word vir baie vergiet sodat hulle sondes vergewe kan word. Ek verklaar nou hier plegtig dat Ek van nou af nie weer wyn sal drink nie totdat Ek opnuut die feeswyn saam met julle sal drink in die koninkryk van my Vader.”

Jesus het sy dissipels gewaarsku dat Hy nog net 'n kort rukkie by hulle sou wees. Hy het voortgegaan en sy verwarde volgelinge getroos.

“Moenie ontsteld wees nie. Hou net aan om op God te vertrou en hou ook aan om op My te vertrou. In die huis van my Vader is daar baie kamers. As dit nie só was nie, sou Ek dit aan julle gesê het. Ek gaan soontoe om vir julle plek gereed te maak. En as Ek gegaan en vir julle plek ingerig het, kom Ek terug en sal julle na My toe neem sodat julle ook kan wees waar Ek is. Julle weet mos waarheen Ek gaan, en hoe om daar te kom.”

Tomas sê vir Jesus: “Here, ons weet nie waarheen U gaan nie; hoe kan ons dan die pad daarheen ken?”

Jesus sê vir hom: “Ek is die weg en die waarheid en die lewe. Niemand kom by die Vader uit behalwe deur My nie. As julle My ken, sou julle my Vader ook geken het. Van nou af ken julle Hom en het julle Hom reeds gesien.”

Toe sê Filippus: “Here, wys ons net die Vader en dit is vir ons genoeg.”

Jesus antwoord hom só: “Ek is al vir só 'n lang tyd by julle, Filippus, en jy ken My nog nie? Wie My reeds gesien het, het ook reeds my Vader gesien. Hoe sê jy dan: ‘Wys ons die Vader?’ Glo jy dan nie dat Ek in 'n hegte verhouding met die Vader leef en Hy met My nie? Die gedagtes wat Ek met julle deel, kom nie uit Myself nie, maar dit kom van die Vader wat in My bly en deur My sy werke uitvoer. Glo in My omdat Ek in 'n hegte verhouding leef met die Vader en Hy

met My; so nie, glo dan net op grond van hierdie werke self. Ek verseker julle, wie aanhou glo in My, sal ook die werke doen wat Ek doen; hy sal selfs nog groter dinge as dit doen, omdat Ek na die Vader toe op pad is. Wat julle ook al sou vra in my Naam, dit sal Ek doen sodat die Vader deur die optrede van die Seun verheerlik word. As julle My enigiets in my Naam vra, sal Ek dit beslis doen.

“As julle My liefhet, sal julle my opdragte gehoorsaam. En Ek sal die Vader vra en Hy sal vir julle ’n ander Raadgewer stuur om vir altyd by julle te wees; dit is die Gees van die waarheid. Die wêreld is nie in staat om Hom te ontvang nie omdat hy Hom nie sien of ken nie. Julle ken Hom egter, omdat Hy by julle gaan bly en in julle sal woon.

“Ek het nog baie dinge om vir julle te sê, maar julle kan dit nie nou verwerk nie. Wanneer Hy ook al kom, die Gees van die waarheid, sal Hy julle begelei in die volle waarheid. Hy sal nie uit Homself praat nie, maar net sê wat Hy hoor. Hy sal die dinge wat gaan kom, aan julle meedeel. Hy sal My verheerlik omdat Hy dit wat Hy van My sal ontvang, aan julle sal meedeel.

“Kyk, daar kom ’n tyd, en dit het reeds aangebreek, dat julle uitmekaargedryf sal word, elkeen op sy eie, terwyl julle My alleen agterlaat. Tog is Ek nie alleen nie, omdat die Vader by My is.

“Ek sê hierdie dinge vir julle sodat julle in My rus en vrede kan vind. In die wêreld sal julle swaarkry beleef, maar skep moed: Ek het die wêreld reeds oorwin.”

Jesus het hierdie dinge gesê, en toe sy oë hemelwaarts gerig en gesê:

“Vader, die uur het aangebreek. Verheerlik u Seun sodat die Seun U kan verheerlik. U het aan die Seun volmag gegee oor die hele mensdom om aan almal wat U aan Hom gegee het, die ewige lewe te gee. En die inhoud van die ewige lewe is dat hulle U ken, die enigste ware God, en Jesus Christus wat U gestuur het. Ek het U op aarde verheerlik deur die werk te voltooi wat U My gegee het om te doen. Verheerlik My dan nou ook by Uself, Vader, met die heerlikheid wat Ek by U gehad het nog voordat die wêreld bestaan het.

“Vader, Ek wil graag hê dat dié mense wat U aan My gegee het, ook saam met My moet wees waar Ek is sodat hulle my heerlikheid kan sien, dié heerlikheid wat U aan My gegee het omdat U My voor die skepping van die wêreld liefgehad het.

“Regverdigte Vader, die wêreld ken U nie, maar Ek ken U en hulle hier weet dat U My gestuur het. Ek het u Naam aan hulle bekendgemaak en Ek sal dit nog verder bekendmaak sodat die liefde waarmee U My liefgehad het, in hulle mag leef en Ek ook in ’n hegte verhouding met hulle mag leef.”

Hulle het toe die loflied gesing en uitgegaan na die Olyfberg toe.

Miskien het hulle ’n lied gesing uit Psalm 115-118, die tradisionele liedere wat tydens die paasmaal gesing is. “Die HERE is genadig en regverdig. Ons God bewys barmhartigheid ... Loof die HERE, want Hy is goed! Sy goedheid duur vir altyd ... Geseënd is die een wat kom in die Naam van die HERE.” Wat het die dissipels gedink en gevoel terwyl hulle Jesus teen die Olyfberg op gevolg het? Hulle het waarskynlik baie kere saam met Hom na hierdie plek gegaan om te bid en te gesels. Maar nou begin skadu’s donkerder as wat hulle hulle kan voorstel oor hulle hoop en drome val.

Jesus het toe vir hulle gesê: “Vannag gaan julle almal aanstoot aan My neem. Daar staan immers geskryf:

“Ek sal die skaapwagter doodmaak
en die skape van die trop sal uitmekaargejaag word.”

“Maar nadat Ek uit die dood opgewek is, sal Ek vooruit na Galilea toe gaan en daar vir julle wag.”

Petrus verseker Hom toe: “Al laat almal U in die steek – ék sal dit nooit doen nie.”

Jesus antwoord hom: “Glo My, Petrus, vannag nog, voordat die haan kraai, sal jy drie maal ontken dat jy my dissipel is.”

Petrus sê toe vir Hom: “Al moet ek saam met U sterf – ek sal dit beslis nooit doen nie!” Al die dissipels het dieselfde verklaar.

Jesus kom toe saam met hulle by ’n olyftuin met die naam Getsemane en Hy sê: “Sit julle hier, terwyl Ek daar anderkant gaan bid.” Hy neem toe vir Petrus en die twee seuns van Sebedeus saam met Hom. Daarop oorval ’n groot ontsteltenis en benoudheid Hom. Hy sê toe vir hulle: “Ek is benoud tot sterwens toe. Bly julle hier, en waak saam met My.”

Hy het toe ’n entjie verder neergeval en met sy gesig plat teen die grond gebid: “O my Vader! As dit moontlik is, neem tog hierdie lydensbeker van My weg. Doen nogtans nie soos Ék wil nie, maar soos

Ű wil.”

Hy kom toe terug by die dissipels en kry hulle aan die slaap. Hy sê vir Petrus: “So, kon julle dan nie eers een uur saam met My wakker bly nie? Wees waaksaam en bid sodat julle nie in die versoeking kom nie. ’n Mens se gees is wel gewillig, maar jou liggaam hou nie altyd by nie.”

Weer het Hy van hulle af weggegaan en gebid: “My Vader! As hierdie beker nie van My kan weggaan sonder dat Ek dit moet drink nie, laat u wil dan uitgevoer word.”

Daar het ’n engel uit die hemel aan Jesus verskyn en Hom versterk. Terwyl Hy intense angs beleef, het Jesus nog ernstiger gebid. Sy sweet het soos druppels bloed geword wat op die grond drup.

Hy het toe teruggegaan en kry hulle weer aan die slaap. Hulle was so vaak dat hulle oë eenvoudig nie wou oopbly nie. Hy het hulle toe daar gelos en weer weggegaan en dieselfde gebed vir die derde keer gebid.

Toe kom Hy na sy dissipels toe en sê: “Slaap en rus julle nog steeds? Die tyd het aangebreek! Ek, die Seun van die Mens, word nou oorgegee in die hande van slegte mense. Staan op, ons moet gaan! Kyk, my verraaier is hier.”

Jesus was nog besig om te praat, toe kom Judas, een van die twaalf dissipels, al daar aan, en saam met hom ’n groot klomp mense gewapen met swaarde en knuppels. Hulle is gestuur deur die priesterhoofde en die familiehoofde van die volk.

Jesus was egter deeglik bewus van alles wat oor Hom sou kom en het op sy eie uit die groep na vore beweeg en vir hulle gesê: “Wie soek julle eintlik?”

Hulle het Hom geantwoord: “Jesus van Nasaret.”

“Dit is Ek,” antwoord Jesus. Judas, die een wat Hom sou uitlewer, het ook daar tussen hulle rondgestaan. En toe Jesus vir hulle sê: “Dit is Ek!” het hulle almal padgegee en op die grond neergeval.

Jesus het sy vraag aan hulle herhaal: “Wie soek julle eintlik?”

“Jesus van Nasaret,” was hulle antwoord.

Jesus se reaksie was: “Ek het dan vir julle gesê dat dit Ek is. As julle Mý dan soek, laat hierdie mense wat saam met My is, weggaan.” Sodoende het die woord wat Hy vroeër uitgespreek het, waar geword: “Uit die mense wat U aan My toevertrou het, het niemand verlore gegaan nie.”

Simon Petrus het 'n swaard by hom gedra. Hy trek toe sy swaard uit die skede, slaan daarmee na die slaaf van die hoofpriester, en kap sy regteroor af. Die slaaf se naam was Malgus.

Jesus sê toe dadelik vir Petrus: “Sit die swaard terug in sy skede. Sal Ek dan nie die beker drink wat die Vader aan My gegee het nie?”

Daarna het Hy die oor aangeraak en dit gesond gemaak.

Jesus het toe aan die priesterhoofde en die bevelvoerders van die tempelwag en die familiehoofde wat teen Hom aangetree het, gesê: “Het julle opgetrek met swaarde en knuppels soos teen 'n rower? Ek was daaglik saam met julle in die tempel, en tog het julle My nie gearrester nie. Maar hierdie is nou julle tyd, die tyd van die mag van die duisternis.”

Bevelvoerders van die tempelwag het Jesus kom gevange neem, en Jesus het Homself oorgegee. Hy kon sy vyande met 'n woord omvergooi. Hy het die mag gehad om groot engel-weermagte op te roep om Hom te red, maar in plaas daarvan gee Hy Homself oor. Die dissipels het geweet iets baie slegs is besig om te gebeur, en hulle het weggehardloop om hulleself te red. Jesus is alleen gelaat saam met sy gevangenes.

Die groep wat Jesus gearrester het, het Hom toe na die woning van Kajafas, die hoofpriester, gebring waar die skrifkenners en die familiehoofde bymekaar was. Intussen het Petrus Hom op 'n veilige afstand gevolg totdat hy uiteindelik in die binnehof van die hoofpriester se woning beland het. Daar het hy by die dienspersoneel gaan sit om te sien wat gaan gebeur.

Die priesterhoofde, trouens die hele Joodse Raad, het vals getuienis teen Jesus probeer kry wat tot sy doodstraf sou lei. En, alhoewel baie hulle kom aanmeld het om vals getuienis teen Jesus te gee, kon hulle geen afdoende getuienis teen Hom kry nie.

Eindelik het daar twee gekom en getuig: “Hierdie man het beweer: ‘Ek kan die tempel afbreek en binne drie dae weer opbou.’”

Daarop het die hoofpriester opgestaan en vir Jesus gevra: “Het jy niks te sê op hierdie aanklag nie? Wat is hierdie ding wat hulle teen jou getuig?” Maar Jesus het bly swyg.

Toe sê die hoofpriester: “Ek eis nou van jou in die Naam van die lewende God dat jy vir ons moet sê of jy die Messias, die Seun van God is.”

Jesus het geantwoord: “Ja, dit is soos u sê. Ek verseker julle: Julle

sal My, die Seun van die Mens, sien sit aan die regterhand van God, die Magtige, en hoe Hy terugkom op die wolke van die hemel.”

Toe skeur die hoofpriester sy klere om te wys hoe geskok hy is en hy roep uit: “Lasterlik! Watter ander getuies het ons nog nodig? Julle het tog nou self hierdie lastering teen God gehoor. Wat is julle bevinding?”

“Hy is skuldig,” antwoord hulle, “hy verdien die doodstraf.”

Daarop spoeg hulle Hom in die gesig en slaan Hom met hulle vuiste. Party het Hom geklap en gesê: “Profeteer vir ons, geagte Messias! Wie is dit wat jou nou net geslaan het?”

Petrus was nie 'n bang man nie. Sy normale reaksie op moeilikheid was om dit tot op die grond te stoei, nie om weg te hardloop nie. Dit is dus te wagte dat dit hy sou wees wat die soldate terug sou volg na die priester se huis en wag op die uitkoms. Miskien het hy aan 'n plan B gedink toe 'n paar mense hom onverhoeds gevang het.

In die middel van die binnehof was daar 'n vuur wat knetterend gebrand het, met mense wat daar rondom sit. Petrus het tussen hulle gaan sit. 'n Diensmeisie het hom raakgesien waar hy sigbaar in die vlamme gloed gesit het. Nadat sy hom goed bekyk het, sê sy: “Hý was ook saam met daardie man.”

Petrus het dit egter heftig ontken: “Vrou, ek ken Hom glad nie!”

'n Rukkie later merk iemand anders hom op en sê: “Hy is mos ook uit hulle geledere.”

Petrus se reaksie was: “Man, ek is beslis nie!”

Ná 'n tussenpose van ongeveer 'n uur het 'n ander persoon ferm bevestig: “Hierdie man was vir seker saam met hom. Hy is tog ook 'n Galileër.”

Petrus het geantwoord: “Man, ek het nie die vaagste benul waarvan jy praat nie!” Eensklaps, terwyl hy nog besig is om te praat, het daar 'n haan gekraai. Die Here het omgedraai en Petrus stip aangekyk. Petrus het die Here se woorde onthou toe Hy aan hom gesê het: “Voordat die haan nog vannag kraai, sal jy drie keer ontken dat jy My ken.” En hy het buitentoe gegaan en onbedaarlik gehuil.

Baie vroeg daardie oggend het al die priesterhoofde en die familiehoofde saam teen Jesus beraadslaag oor hoe hulle moes optree om sy dood te bewerk. Hulle het Hom toe in boeie weggeneem en aan Pilatus, die Romeinse goewerneur, oorhandig.

Toe Judas, sy verraaier, besef dat Jesus ter dood veroordeel is, het

hy bitter spyt gekry en die 30 silwergeldstukke na die priesterhoofde en die familiehoofde teruggevat met die woorde: “Ek het verkeerd gedoen. Ek het ’n onskuldige man uitgelewer!”

Hulle het geantwoord: “Dit raak ons nie. Dis jou probleem.”

Judas gooi toe die geld op die tempelvloer neer, draai om en gaan hang homself op.

Die Joodse leiers het vir Jesus na Pilatus toe gebring wat vir vier jaar namens Rome oor die streek Judea regeer het. Historiese rekords wys dat hy nie ’n vriend van die Jode was nie. Hy het gereeld opdrag gegee aan die soldate om Joodse opstandelinge te slaan en dood te maak, en hy het geen probleem daarmee gehad om Joodse leiers te affronteer deur simbole van Romeinse afgode in Jerusalem te sit nie. Op hierdie Vrydagoggend van die week van Paasfees het die Joodse leiers hom gevra om Jesus as ’n bedreiging te veroordeel. Pilatus was vasgevang. As hy sou weier om Jesus te veroordeel, sou die Joodse leiers hom daarvan beskuldig dat hy nie ’n vriend van die keiser was nie (’n baie gevaarlike openbare beeld). As hy sou toestem om Jesus te kruisig, sou hy teen sy eie oordeel optree en, miskien selfs erger, ingee vir dié wat hy verag. Hy moes die gevangene self ondervra.

Pilatus het toe weer in die hoofkwartier ingegaan, Jesus geroep en vir Hom gesê: “Is jy die Koning van die Jode?”

Jesus het daarop reageer: “Sê u dit uit u eie, of het ander dit oor My aan u vertel?”

“Ek is mos nie ’n Jood nie!” het Pilatus geantwoord. “Jou volk en jou priesterhoofde het jou aan my uitgelewer. Wat het jy regtig verkeerd gedoen?”

Jesus het geantwoord: “My koningskap is nie van hierdie wêreld nie. As my heerskappy van hierdie wêreld was, sou my onderdane hard geveg het sodat Ek nie aan die Joodse owerhede uitgelewer word nie. Maar nou is my heerskappy nie van hier nie.”

“Is jy dan tog wel ’n koning?” vra Pilatus.

“U sê dit, dat Ek ’n koning is,” antwoord Jesus. “Hiervoor is Ek gebore en hiervoor het Ek na die wêreld toe gekom, met die doel om vir die waarheid getuigenis af te lê. Elkeen wat lief is vir die waarheid, luister na my stem.”

Pilatus sê toe vir Jesus: “Wat is waarheid?” Terwyl hy dit sê, gaan Pilatus weer buitentoe na die Jode en kondig aan: “Ek vind geen skuld in hom nie. Dit is egter die gebruik by julle dat ek iemand vir julle loslaat op die Paasfees. Wil julle dus hê dat ek vir julle die Koning van

die Jode loslaat?"

Hulle skree toe terug: "Nee, beslis nie daardie man nie, eerder vir Barabbas!" Barabbas was 'n misdadiger.

Toe het Pilatus Jesus geneem en Hom laat gésel. En die soldate het 'n kroon van dorings gevleg en dit op Jesus se kop gesit. Hulle het ook vir Hom 'n pers kleed aangetrek, op Hom afgestorm en gesê: "Gegroet, Koning van die Jode!" Hulle het Hom aanhoudend met die vuus geslaan.

Pilatus het weer 'n keer buitentoe gegaan en vir die Jode gesê: "Kyk, ek bring hom vir julle buitentoe sodat julle kan besef dat ek hom onskuldig bevind." Daarop het Jesus buitentoe gekom, met die kroon van dorings op sy kop en die pers mantel aan. Pilatus sê vir hulle: "Dáár is die mens!"

Toe die priesterhoofde en die wagte Hom sien, het hulle nog harder geskree: "Kruisig hom! Kruisig hom!"

"Neem julle hom en kruisig hom, want ek vind geen skuld in hom nie," sê Pilatus daarop aan hulle.

Die Jode het hom geantwoord: "Ons beskik oor 'n wet en daarvolgens moet hy sterf omdat hy homself as die Seun van God voorgehou het."

Toe Pilatus hierdie opmerking hoor, het hy nog banger geword, sy hoofkwartier binnegestap en weer vir Jesus gesê: "Waarvandaan kom jy?" Maar Jesus het hom nie geantwoord nie. Daarop reageer Pilatus toe: "Praat jy nie met my nie? Weet jy nie dat ek die bevoegdheid het om jou vry te laat, en ook die bevoegdheid om jou te laat kruisig nie?"

Jesus het hom geantwoord: "U sou geen bevoegdheid oor My hê as dit nie van Bo aan u gegee was nie. Daarom het hy wat My aan u uitgelewer het, nog groter skuld."

Na aanleiding hiervan het Pilatus Jesus probeer vrylaat, maar die Jode het dit uitgeskreeu: "As u hom bevry, is u nie 'n vriend van die keiser nie. Elkeen wat homself as 'n koning voorhou, is in konflik met die keiser!"

Toe Pilatus hierdie woorde hoor, het hy Jesus buitentoe gebring en self op die regterstoel gaan sit by 'n plek wat Klipterras genoem word, in Aramees 'Gabbata'. Dit het saamgeval met die voorbereiding van die Paasfees, ongeveer twaalfuur die middag.

Hy sê toe vir die Jode: "Dáár is julle Koning!"

Hulle het net geskree: "Vat hom weg! Vat hom weg! Kruisig hom!"

Pilatus sê vir hulle: "Moet ek julle kóning kruisig?"

Die priesterhoofde het geantwoord: "Ons het nie 'n koning nie, ons

het slegs die keiser.”

Pilatus het Jesus toe oorgegee om gekruisig te word.

Daarop het hulle Jesus weggelei.

Op pad kom hulle 'n man met die naam Simon teë. Hy was van Sirene afkomstig. Hulle het hom opgekommandeer om Jesus se kruis te dra.

Romeinse kruisigings was 'n wrede straf. Die gewrigte en voete is teen 'n houtkruis vasgespyker; dit was 'n marteling, 'n stadige en baie openbare manier om dood te gaan. Die slagoffer se kreune het vir die skare hulle oggend-vermaak verskaf. Om 'n kruisiging te aanskou, was 'n goeie manier om ander misdadigers af te skrik. Jesus het hierdie afskuwelike dood nie verdien nie. Hy het sy lewe gegee, Hy het God se groter prentjie van verlossing gesien wat deur sy lewe en dood tot voltoering sou kom.

Die verbygangers het net spottend hulle koppe geskud en Hom toegesnou: “Ha-ha, jy kan mos die tempel afbreek en dit weer in drie dae opbou! Red jouself nou, en kom van die kruis af!”

Die priesterhoofde en die skrifkenners het ook onder mekaar met Jesus gespot en gesê: “Foeitog, hy het ander gered, maar hy kan homself nie red nie. Hy is dan glo die Messias, die Koning van Israel. Laat hy nou afkom van die kruis! Dan sal ons sien en glo!” Selfs die kriminele wat saam met Hom gekruisig is, het Hom beledig.

Twee ander misdadigers is ook saam met Jesus weggelei om tereggestel te word. Toe hulle by die plek aankom wat Kopbeen genoem word, het hulle Jesus daar gekruisig, asook die misdadigers – een aan Jesus se regter- en een aan sy linkerkant.

Daarop het Jesus gesê: “Vader, vergewe hulle, want hulle besef nie wat hulle doen nie!” Hulle het ook sy klere verdeel deur die lot te werp.

Die volk het net daar gestaan en toekyk. En die leiers het aangehou om Hom te bespot met dié woorde: “Ander het hy gered. Laat hy homself red as hy die Messias, die uitverkorene van God is!”

Ook die soldate het vorentoe beweeg en Jesus gespot. Hulle het vir Hom asynwyn aangebied en gesê: “As jy die Koning van die Jode is, red jouself.”

Daar was ook 'n kennisgewing bokant Jesus se kop: “Hierdie man is die Koning van die Jode.”

Een van die misdadigers wat daar gehang is, het Jesus aanhou beledig deur te sê: “Is jy dan nie die Messias nie? Red jouself en ook vir ons!”

Die ander een het hom egter bestraf en gesê: “Het jy óók nie respek vir God nie, alhoewel jy dieselfde straf as hierdie man ondergaan! Ons het dit terdeë verdien, want ons verdien die straf vir wat ons gedoen het. Maar hierdie man het niks verkeerd gedoen nie.”

Hy het verder gesê: “Jesus, onthou my asseblief wanneer U in u koninkryk kom.”

Jesus se antwoord was: “Ek verseker jou, vandag nog sal jy saam met My in die paradys wees.”

Naby die kruis van Jesus het sy ma, sy ma se suster en Maria, die vrou van Klopas, en Maria Magdalena gestaan. Toe Jesus sy ma sien, en die lieflingdissipel wat by sy ma staan, sê Hy vir haar: “Vrou, dáár is u seun.” Daarna sê Hy vir die dissipel: “Kyk, dáár is jou ma.” Van daardie uur af het die dissipel Jesus se ma by hom aan huis geneem.

Vir dié wat gekruisig is, was die dood die enigste uitweg. Daarom het Jesus daardie dag, saam met twee ander slagoffers en 'n skare, vir die dood gewag om sy lyding te verlig. Voor daardie oomblik sou daar egter 'n dieper pyn kom. 'n Pyn veel erger as die spykers in sy voete en gewrigte, die hortende asemhaling of die “doringkroon” wat gate in sy kop steek. God het die mensdom se regmatige straf vir sonde op Jesus uitgestort. En selfs die aarde het gebewe.

Teen ongeveer twaalfuur het duisternis toegesak oor die hele land tot drie-uur toe. Die son is uitgedoof en die swaar gordyn van die tempel het middeledeur geskeur.

Teen drie-uur het Jesus baie hard uitgeskreeu: “*Eli, Eli, lemá sabagtani,*” wat beteken: “My God, my God, waarom het U My verlaat?”

Party van die omstanders het dit misverstaan en gedink Hy roep na die profeet Elia.

Een van hulle hardloop toe gou, vat 'n spons, maak dit vol suur wyn en steek dit op die punt van 'n riet om Hom te laat drink. Die ander het egter gesê: “Los hom. Kom ons kyk of Elia hom kom red.”

Toe Jesus die suur wyn proe, het Hy gesê: “Dit is nou afgehandel!” Toe het Hy sy kop vooroor laat val en sy asem uitgeblaas.

Op daardie oomblik het die swaar gordyn in die tempel in twee geskeur, van bo tot onder. Die aarde het gebewe en die rotse het uitmekaar gebars. Selfs die grafte het oopgegaan en God het die liggame van baie gelowiges wat reeds dood was, weer lewendig gemaak. Hulle het uit die grafte gegaan, en ná Jesus se opstanding het hulle die heilige stad Jerusalem binnegegaan en aan baie mense verskyn.

Die Romeinse offisier oor honderd en die ander soldate wat Jesus bewaak het, het baie beangs geword toe hulle die aardbewing en die ander gebeurtenisse sien, en hulle het gesê: “Hierdie man was werklikwaar die Seun van God!”

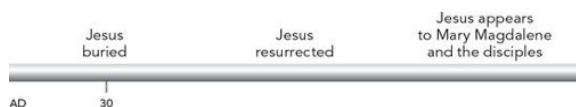
Die hele skare wat saamgedrom het vir hierdie skouspel en gesien het wat alles gebeur het, het as teken van rou op hulle bors geslaan en huis toe gegaan. Maar Jesus se vriende, asook die vroue wat Hom van Galilea af gevolg het, het op ’n afstand bly staan en al hierdie dinge aanskou.

27

The Resurrection

NOW IT WAS THE DAY OF PREPARATION, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jewish leaders did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: “Not one of his bones will be broken,” and, as another scripture says, “They will look on the one they have pierced.”

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.



The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Jesus died and was buried on Friday. The next day was the Jewish Sabbath, and a guard was posted to prevent any tampering with the body. Then on the first day of the week, Sunday, those who mourned Jesus came to pay their respects.

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were

white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples.

So Peter and the other disciple¹ started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary² stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?”

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.”

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!”

(which means “Teacher”).

Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”

“What things?” he asked.

“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.”

He said to them, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus

continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.” Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, “Do you have anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence.

He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not

with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.”

Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved³ said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and

some bread.

Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey

everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

God had promised since Old Testament days that he would redeem and restore his people. He sent his Son, the Savior, who died and was raised to life so that people could be forgiven and brought into a relationship of peace and fellowship with God. What a story! But was Jesus’ resurrection the end of the saga? What else could possibly happen? Luke, the author of the Gospel by that name, answers that question in his second work— the “Acts of the Apostles,” better known simply as “Acts.”

1The other disciple: Probably John.

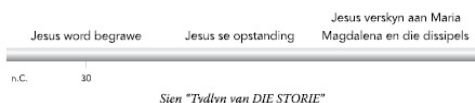
2Mary: That is, Mary Magdalene.

3The disciple whom Jesus loved: Probably John.

Die opstanding

Aangesien dit die voorbereiding vir die Sabbat was, wou die Jode nie hê dat die liggame op die Sabbat aan die kruis moes bly hang nie, want daardie spesifieke Sabbat was 'n belangrike een. Hulle het Pilatus toe gaan vra dat die kruiseling se bene gebreek en die liggame verwyder moes word. Die soldate het toe gekom en die bene van die eerste een gebreek en ook dié van die ander een wat saam met Jesus gekruisig was. Toe hulle by Jesus kom en sien dat Hy alreeds gesterf het, het hulle nie sy bene gebreek nie. Een van die soldate het egter sy spies in Jesus se sy gesteek en daar het dadelik bloed en water uitgevloei. Hy wat dit aanskou het, vertel dit gesaghebbend, en sy getuienis is waar. Hy weet ook dat hy die waarheid praat sodat ook julle tot geloof moet kom. Want hierdie dinge het gebeur sodat die Skrif vervul kan word: “Geen been van Hom sal gebreek word nie.” Verder sê die Skrif: “Hulle sal Hom aanskou vir wie hulle deurboor het.”

Hierna het Josef wat van Arimatea afkomstig was – omdat hy vir die Joodse leiers bang was, was hy 'n geheime dissipel van Jesus – Pilatus gaan vra of hy die liggaam van Jesus kon kry. Pilatus het dit toegestaan. Josef het toe die liggaam gaan haal. Nikodemus, wat Jesus die eerste keer gedurende die nag besoek het, het ook gekom en 'n mengsel van ongeveer 50 liter mirre en aalwyn gebring. Hulle het toe Jesus se liggaam geneem en dit in linnedoeke saam met die speserye toegevou soos dit die gebruik van die Jode was om iemand vir 'n begrafnis voor te berei.



Op die plek waar Jesus gekruisig is, was 'n tuin en in die tuin 'n nuwe graf waarin nog niemand begrawe was nie. Met die oog op die

Joodse dag van voorbereiding, en omdat die graf naby was, het hulle Jesus daar neergelê.

Die volgende dag – dit was die dag ná die Vrydag – het die priesterhoofde en die Fariseërs met Pilatus gaan praat. Hulle het vir hom gesê: “U Edele, ons onthou hierdie bedrieër het, toe hy nog gelewe het, gesê: ‘Na drie dae sal ek uit die dood opstaan.’ Daarom versoek ons u om opdrag te gee dat die graf vir drie dae bewaak word. Dit sal sy dissipels verhinder om sy liggaam te kom steel en vir almal te vertel: ‘God het Hom uit die dood opgewek.’ As dit gebeur, sal dinge nog slegter daaraan toe wees as voorheen.”

Pilatus het geantwoord: “Hier is ’n wag vir julle. Gaan beveilig die graf so goed moontlik.” Hulle het toe die graf gaan beveilig deur die klip te verseël en dit deur die wagte te laat oppas.

Jesus het gesterf en is op die Vrydag begrawe. Die volgende dag was die Joodse Sabbat, en daar is wagte voor die graf geplaas om te keer dat enigiemand met die lyk peuter. Op die eerste dag van die week, die Sondag, het dié wat oor Jesus se dood gerou het, na die graf toe gekom.

Die volgende aand, toe die Sabbat verby was, het Maria Magdalena en Maria, Jakobus se ma, en Salome aromatiese olie gaan koop om Jesus se liggaam daarmee te behandel. Baie vroeg Sondagmôre, net toe die son opkom, kom hulle by die graf aan. Op pad soontoe het hulle nog onder mekaar gewonder wie die klip voor die ingang van die graf vir hulle sou wegrol.

Skielik was daar ’n geweldige aardbewing omdat daar ’n engel van die hemel af gekom, die klip voor die graf weggerol en daarop gaan sit het. Sy gesig het geblink soos weerlig en sy klere was sneeuwit. Die wagte het van ang begin bewe oor die engel en toe soos dooies bewusteloos neergeslaan.

Daarop het die engel die vroue aangespreek met die woorde: “Julle hoef nie bang te wees nie. Ek weet julle soek Jesus wat gekruisig is. Hy is nie hier nie, want Hy is opgewek uit die dood, presies soos Hy gesê het. Kom kyk, hier het sy liggaam gelê. En gaan sê nou dadelik vir sy dissipels: ‘Jesus is uit die dood opgewek, en Hy gaan julle solank vooruit Galilea toe. Julle sal Hom dáár sien.’ Julle kan reken op wat ek vir julle sê.”

Hulle het toe haastig van die graf af weggegaan. Oorstelp van skok,

maar nog meer van 'n ontsaglike blydschap, het hulle gehardloop om die boodskap aan sy dissipels te gaan gee.

Petrus en die ander dissipel het uitgekóm en na die graf toe gehardloop. Die twee het saam gehardloop, maar die ander dissipel het vinniger as Petrus gehardloop en eerste by die graf aangekom. Toe hy vooroor buk, sien hy net die linnedoeke daar lê, maar hy het nie ingegaan nie. Simon Petrus het ná hom ook daar aangekom en by die graf ingegaan. Hy sien toe ook die linnedoeke daar lê, én die kopdoek wat om Jesus se kop was. Die kopdoek het nie by die ander doeke gelê nie, maar was eenkant opgerol. Daarna het die ander dissipel wat eerste by die graf aangekom het, ook ingegaan, gesien, en geglo. Hulle het nog nie die Skrif verstaan dat Jesus uit die dood moet opstaan nie. Daarna het die dissipels weer teruggegaan huis toe.

Maria het buite die graf gestaan en huil. Terwyl sy huil, het sy vooroor gebuk en in die graf in gekyk. Sy sien toe twee engele met wit klere aan wat sit op dieselfde plek waar die liggaam van Jesus gelê het, een aan die kopkant en een aan die voetkant.

Hulle vra haar: “Vrou, waarom huil jy?”

Sy antwoord hulle: “Hulle het my Here weggeneem en ek weet nie waar hulle Hom neergelê het nie.” Nadat sy dit gesê het, het sy omgedraai en Jesus daar sien staan, maar sy het nie besef dat dit Jesus was nie.

Jesus sê vir haar: “Vrou, waarom huil jy? Wie soek jy?”

Sy het gemeen dat dit die tuinwerker is, en het vir Hom gesê: “Meneer, as ú Hom weggedra het, sê asseblief vir my waar u Hom neergelê het en ek sal Hom gaan haal.”

Jesus sê vir haar: “Maria!”

Sy draai om en sê vir Hom in Aramees: “Rabboeni!” Dit beteken ‘Leermeester’.

Jesus sê toe vir haar: “Moenie aan My raak nie, want Ek het nog nie na die Vader opgevaar nie. Gaan na my broers en vertel vir hulle: Ek vaar op na my Vader toe, wat ook julle Vader is, na my God toe, wat ook julle God is.”

Maria Magdalena het die boodskap aan Jesus se dissipels gaan oordra: “Ek het die Here gesien!” Sy het ook vertel wat Hy vir haar gesê het.

En kyk, op dieselfde dag was twee uit hulle geledere op pad na 'n dorpie met die naam Emmaus, elf kilometer vanaf Jerusalem. Hulle was druk in gesprek met mekaar oor al hierdie dinge wat gebeur het.

Terwyl hulle nog so loop en gesels en dinge probeer ontrafel, het Jesus self nadergekom en saam met hulle verder geloop. Hulle oë is egter verhinder om Hom te herken.

Hy sê toe vir hulle: “Oor watter sake loop julle só ernstig en redeneer?”

Met somber gesigte het hulle gaan stil staan. Een van hulle wat Kleopas genoem word, antwoord Jesus toe: “U is seker die enigste buitelanders in Jerusalem wat nie kennis dra van al die dinge wat gedurende hierdie dae in die stad gebeur het nie.”

Jesus reageer en vra hulle: “Watter dinge?”

Hulle antwoord Hom: “Dié dinge wat gaan oor Jesus van Nasaret. Hy was ’n profeet, kragtig in woord en daad voor God en die hele volk. Maar die priesterhoofde en ons volksleiers het Hom uitgelewer om tot die dood veroordeel en gekruisig te word. Ons het bly hoop dat dit Hy is wat Israel gaan verlos. Maar dit is ook al vandag die derde dag vandat al hierdie dinge gebeur het. Sommige vroue uit ons geledere het ons nog boonop heeltemal verwar. Hulle was vanoggend baie vroeg by die graf, maar kon nie sy liggaam daar kry nie. Hulle het kom berig dat hulle ’n visioen van engele gesien het wat gesê het dat Hy lewe. Sommige van ons het na die graf toe gegaan en dit net so aangetref soos die vroue vertel het. Maar vir Hóm het hulle nie gesien nie.”

Toe sê Jesus vir hulle: “O, hoe sonder begrip en traag van hart is julle om alles wat die profete gesê het, te glo! Moes die Messias nie hierdie dinge ly om sy heerlikheid in te gaan nie?” Hierna het Jesus begin om vanaf Moses en al die profete al die Skrifgedeeltes wat oor Hom handel, vir hulle te interpreteer.

Toe hulle naderkom aan die dorpie waarheen hulle op pad was, het Jesus voorgegee dat Hy verder wil reis. Maar hulle het by Hom aangedring: “Bly by ons oor. Die son trek al water en die dag is verby.” Toe het Jesus by hulle ingedraai om saam met hulle oor te bly.

Terwyl hulle saam met Hom aan tafel was, het Jesus brood geneem, gedank, dit gebreek en aan hulle gegee. Toe het hulle oë oopgegaan en hulle het Hom herken. Daarop het Hy voor hulle oë verdwyn.

Hulle sê toe vir mekaar: “Was ons harte nie vuur en vlam in ons toe Hy met ons op pad gepraat en die Skrif vir ons geïnterpreteer het nie?”

Hulle het daar en dan opgestaan en na Jerusalem toe teruggegaan en die elf aangetref en die ander saam met hulle, wat die nuus vertel: “Die Here is regtig opgewek, en Hy het aan Simon verskyn!”

Toe vertel hulle wat op pad gebeur het en hoe Hy aan hulle bekend geword het by die breek van die brood.

Terwyl hulle nog besig was om hierdie dinge te bespreek, het Jesus onverwags tussen hulle gestaan en vir hulle gesê: “Vrede vir julle!”

Hulle het groot geskrik en beangs geword en gedink dat hulle ’n spook sien. Hy sê toe vir hulle: “Waarom is julle so verward en waarom kom daar twyfelgedagtes in julle harte op? Kyk na my hande en my voete: Dis mos Ek self. Vat aan My en kyk! ’n Spook het tog nie vleis en bene soos julle kan sien dat Ek het nie.”

Terwyl Hy dit sê, wys Hy vir hulle sy hande en voete. Toe hulle vanweë blydschap en verbasing nog nie glo nie, sê Hy vir hulle: “Het julle miskien iets te ete hier?” Daarop gee hulle aan Hom ’n stuk gebakte vis. Hy het dit geneem en in hulle teenwoordigheid opgeëet.

Daarna het Hy vir hulle gesê: “Toe Ek nog saam met julle was, het Ek aan julle verduidelik dat alles wat in die wet van Moses en in die profete en die psalms oor My geskryf is, vervul moet word.”

Toe het Hy hulle verstand geopen om die Skrifte te verstaan. Daarop het Hy gesê: “Só staan dit opgeteken: ‘Die Messias moet ly en op die derde dag opstaan uit die dood.’ En op grond van sy Naam moet bekering tot vergifnis van sondes aan al die nasies verkondig word. Julle moet by Jerusalem begin en van hierdie dinge getuig.

“En kyk, Ek sal die belofte van my Vader aan julle stuur. Julle moet in die stad bly totdat julle van God af met krag bemagtig is.”

Tomas, ook genoem Didimus, een van die twaalf, was nie saam met die ander dissipels toe Jesus daar aangekom het nie. Die ander dissipels sê toe vir hom: “Ons het die Here gesien!”

Maar hy het vir hulle gesê: “As ek nie die merk van die spykers in sy hande sien en my vinger in die spykermerke steek en my hand in sy sy steek nie, sal ek nóóit glo nie.”

Agt dae later was Jesus se dissipels weer saam, en Tomas was by hulle. Die deure was op slot en grendel, maar Jesus het tussen hulle kom staan en aan hulle gesê: “Vrede vir julle!” Daarna sê Hy vir Tomas: “Bring jou vinger hier en kyk na my hande, en bring jou hand en steek dit in my sy; en hou op ongelowig wees, maar word gelowig!”

Tomas het vir Jesus gesê: “My Here en my God!”

Jesus se reaksie daarop was: “Glo jy nou nadat jy klaar gesien het? Geseënd is hulle wat nie sien nie, en tog geglo het.”

Daarna het Jesus weer aan sy dissipels by die Meer van Tiberias verskyn. Dit het só gebeur. Die volgende dissipels was daar saam:

Simon Petrus en Tomas (wat ook Didimus genoem is), Natanael van Kana in Galilea, die seuns van Sebedeus, en nog twee ander. Simon Petrus sê vir hulle: “Ek gaan visvang.” Hulle sê vir hom: “Ons gaan ook saam met jou.” Hulle het in die skuit gaan klim, en het daardie nag niks gevang nie.

Net ná dagbreek het Jesus daar op die strand gestaan, maar sy dissipels was nie daarvan bewus dat dit Hy is nie.

Hy vra toe vir hulle: “Kinders, het julle nie iets om te eet nie?”

Hulle antwoord vir Jesus was net: “Nee.”

Hy sê toe vir hulle: “Gooi die net aan die regterkant van die boot uit en julle sal vis kry.” Hulle het die net toe uitgegooi, en kon dit nie weer intrek nie as gevolg van die groot hoeveelheid vis.

Die liefingdissipel sê toe vir Petrus: “Dit is die Here!” Toe Simon Petrus hoor dat dit die Here is, het hy sy klere aangetrek, want hy was halfpad kaal, en hy het in die water gespring. Die ander dissipels het solank met die bootjie nadergekom, want hulle was nie ver van die land af nie, ongeveer 100 meter, en hulle het die net met visse land toe gesleep. Toe hulle aan land kom, sien hulle ’n vuurtjie met ’n vis wat daarop lê, en daar was ook brood. Jesus sê toe vir hulle: “Bring van die vis wat julle so pas gevang het.”

Simon Petrus het in die boot geklim en die net aan land getrek. Dit was vol groot visse, 153 van hulle. Al was daar só baie, het die net nie geskeur nie.

Jesus het hulle uitgenooi: “Kom kry ontbyt.” Nie een van sy dissipels het dit gewaag om Hom te vra: “Wie is U?” nie. Hulle het net geweet dat dit die Here is. Jesus het nadergekom, die brood geneem en aan hulle uitgedeel, net so ook die vis. Dit was reeds die derde keer dat Jesus aan sy dissipels verskyn het nadat Hy uit die dood opgewek is.

Toe hulle klaar ontbyt geëet het, vra Jesus vir Simon Petrus: “Simon, seun van Johannes, het jy My lief, meer as hierdies?”

Petrus sê vir Jesus: “Ja, Here, U weet dat ek U liefhet.”

Jesus sê vir hom: “Gaan versorg my lammers.”

Jesus vra hom toe ’n tweede keer: “Simon, seun van Johannes, het jy My lief?”

“Ja, Here, U weet dat ek U liefhet,” antwoord Petrus.

Jesus sê vir hom: “Wees ’n herder vir my skape.”

’n Derde keer vra Jesus hom: “Simon, seun van Johannes, het jy My lief?”

Petrus het hartseer geword omdat Jesus hom ’n derde keer gevra

het: “Het jy My lief?” en hy antwoord Jesus: “Here, U weet alles. U weet dat ek U liefhet.”

Jesus sê vir hom: “Gaan versorg my skape. Ek verseker jou, toe jy nog jonger was, het jy self jou klere vasgegordel en het jy rondgegaan waar jy ook al wou; wanneer jy egter oud is, sal jy jou hande uitstrek en iemand anders sal jou klere vasgordel en jou bring waar jy nie graag sal wil wees nie.” Dit het Jesus gesê om te sinspeel op die soort dood waarmee Petrus God sou verheerlik. Nadat Hy dit gesê het, sê Jesus vir Petrus: “Volg My as my dissipel!”

Die elf dissipels het toe na Galilea gegaan, na die berg soos Jesus hulle beveel het. Toe hulle Hom sien, het hulle Hom aanbid, alhoewel party van hulle nog getwyfel het.

Jesus kom toe nader en sê vir sy dissipels: “God het die volle mag oor hemel en aarde aan My toevertrou. Gaan dan, maak al die nasies my dissipels, en doop hulle in die Naam van die Vader en die Seun en die Heilige Gees. Leer hulle om alles te gehoorsaam wat Ek aan julle opgedra het. En weet vir seker: Ek is vir altyd by julle, tot aan die einde van die wêreldgeskiedenis.”

Daar bestaan nog baie ander dinge wat Jesus gedoen het. As hulle egter een vir een opgeskryf moes word, dink ek sou die wêreld nie plek hê vir al die boeke wat geskryf word nie.

Hierdie tekens is wel opgeskryf sodat julle tot die geloof kan kom dat Jesus die Messias is, die Seun van God, en sodat julle deur aan te hou glo, in sy Naam die lewe kan hê.

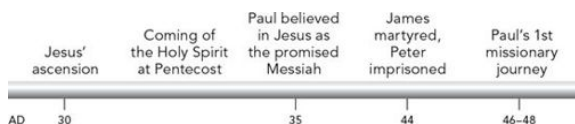
God het sedert die Ou-Testamentiese tye belowe om sy mense te verlos en te herstel. Hy het sy Seun, die Verlosser, gestuur wat aan die kruis gesterf het en uit die dood opgestaan het sodat mense vergewe kan word en in 'n verhouding van vrede en gemeenskap met God kan wees. Wat 'n storie! Maar was Jesus se opstanding die einde van die saga? Wat anders kan gebeur? Lukas, die outeur van die gelyknamige Evangelie, antwoord daardie vraag in sy tweede werk – die “Handelinge van die Apostels” beter bekend as “Handelinge”.

New Beginnings

IN MY FORMER BOOK, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”



After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Jesus' ascension occurred 40 days after his resurrection. In the Jewish calendar, the harvest festival called Pentecost¹ came 50 days after the Sabbath of Passover week — coinciding with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. At this eventful Pentecost celebration, the

Holy Spirit appeared like flames over the disciples' heads and endued them with the Holy Spirit's power and a new sense of God-with-us. During the 10 days between Jesus' ascension to heaven and the Festival of Pentecost, the 11 disciples chose a replacement for Judas, and then spent most of their time praying and waiting for Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit to arrive. When the Holy Spirit came, the house rocked.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,² Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,

your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day
of the Lord.

And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.”

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off — for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer — at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned

him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

“Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees³ came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.’

Salvation⁴ is found in no one else, for there is no other name under

heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were

healed.

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people all about this new life.”

At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin — the full assembly of the elders of Israel — and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead — whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was

honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Growing movements create logistical nightmares. As hundreds, then thousands, said yes to following the resurrected Jesus, they gathered together, full of joy and needs. So who would run the errands, distribute food, clean the dishes and make sure everyone had name tags? For these important service jobs, the 12 apostles chose a small corps of servers, considered to be the first “deacons.” Among them was a man described as “full of God’s grace and power.” His name was Stephen.

Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) — Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia — who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against

God.”

So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?”

Stephen’s answer to this question came in the form of a Jewish history lesson about God’s great story of redemption. Then Stephen spoke of the “Righteous One,” Jesus.

“You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him — you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

And Saul approved of their killing him.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city.

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

“Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.”

But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord — Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, “Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?” Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him, but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him. But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to

Tarsus.

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

Most of the new Christians were Jewish, but God's story of Good News was for everyone. Things had to change.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked.

The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."

When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants. He told them everything that had happened and sent them to Joppa.

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

"Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean."

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken

back to heaven.

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

Peter went down and said to the men, "I'm the one you're looking for. Why have you come?"

The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

Peter went on to say he realized that God doesn't show favoritism but invites people from every ethnic group and nation to accept the gospel through Jesus the Messiah. As Peter was explaining the gospel message and the first-ever Gentile audience was responding with faith and repentance, something amazing happened: the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on them just as it had been on the Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost.

At the same time the church was growing, it was also facing persecution from Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great

(who reigned when Jesus was born) and nephew of Herod Antipas (who had John the Baptist beheaded).

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.

Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

"You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting

that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.”

But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.

In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king’s country for their food supply.

On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of a man.” Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

Saul and his mentor Barnabas spent a year ministering to the first largely Gentile church at Antioch, where the believers were first called “Christians.” From there the Lord called them to missionary service. Saul and Barnabas, accompanied at first by John Mark — who was Barnabas’s cousin and who would later write the Gospel of Mark— began traveling and proclaiming Jesus throughout Asia Minor. It was also during this time that Saul got a name change to “Paul.” Because God’s Spirit was leading them, Saul (Paul) and his colleagues boldly spoke about Jesus everywhere they went. Little did they know what they would have to endure for the Good News.

1Pentecost: The Jewish festival celebrated on the 50th day after Passover. Jesus’ disciples were celebrating this festival in Jerusalem when God sent his Holy Spirit to empower them with new life and blessing.

2Asia: That is, the Roman province by the same name.

3Sadducees: An upper-class group of Jewish leaders who oversaw the temple administration.

4Salvation: Rescue from death or destruction. In the Biblical sense, the term *salvation* expresses the release from the debt of sin owed to God and the experience of never-ending life with him in heaven. Also relevant to earthly life, *salvation* can refer to the transformation of people's daily lives when they believe in Jesus.

'n Nuwe begin

Beste Teofilus. In my eerste boek het ek jou vertel van alles wat Jesus begin doen en leer het tot op die dag toe Hy opgeneem is. Voor sy hemelvaart het Hy deur die Heilige Gees aan die mans wat Hy as apostels uitgekies het, opdragte gegee. In die loop van 40 dae na sy lydenstyd het Hy by verskeie geleenthede aan die apostels verskyn, en op baie maniere aan hulle bewys dat Hy regtig lewe. Hy het telkens met hulle oor die koningsheerskappy van God gepraat. 'n Keer toe hulle so saam was, het Hy aan hulle dié opdrag gegee: “Moenie Jerusalem verlaat voordat julle van die Vader ontvang het wat Hy belowe het nie. Julle onthou mos dat Ek julle vroeër daarvan vertel het: Johannes het met water gedoop, maar julle sal binne 'n paar dae met die Heilige Gees gedoop word.”



Toe hulle 'n keer weer bymekaar was, het die apostels Jesus aanhou vra: “Here, is dit nou die tyd dat U Israel weer 'n onafhanklike volk met 'n eie koning gaan maak?”

“Die Vader bepaal hierdie datums,” het Hy geantwoord, “en die bedoeling is nie dat julle dit moet ken nie. Maar wanneer die Heilige Gees oor julle kom, sal julle krag ontvang en oral mense eerstehands van My vertel – in Jerusalem, oor die hele Judea, in Samaria, en tot in die uithoeke van die aarde.”

Hy het dit gesê, en is toe in die hemelruim opgeneem terwyl hulle toekyk. Hy het in 'n wolk verdwyn.

Toe Hy wegraak en hulle nog stip die hemelruim inkyk, het daar skielik twee mans in wit klere by hulle gestaan. Die twee mans sê toe: “Galilese manne, waarom staan julle na die hemel en kyk? Jesus is van julle af weggeneem die hemel in. Hy sal egter nét so terugkom

soos julle Hom die hemel sien ingaan het!”

Jesus se hemelvaart het 40 dae ná sy opstanding plaasgevind. In die Joodse kalender vind die oesfees, die Pinkster, 50 dae ná die Sabbat van die Paasfees plaas – dit het saamgeval met Jesus se kruisiging en opstanding. By hierdie opwindende Pinksterfees het die Heilige Gees soos vuurvlamme oor die dissipels se koppe verskyn en hulle met die krag van die Heilige Gees en ’n nuwe gevoel van God-in-ons voorsien. Gedurende die tien dae tussen Jesus se hemelvaart en die Pinksterfees het die elf dissipels ’n plaasvervanger vir Judas gekies en toe die meeste van hulle tyd deurgebring deur te bid en vir Jesus se beloofde Heilige Gees te wag. Toe die Heilige Gees kom, het die huis geskud.

Op Pinksterdag, sewe weke na Jesus se opstanding, was al die gelowiges op een plek saam. Skielik was daar in die lug bokant hulle ’n geluid soos van ’n geweldige stormwind, en dit het die hele huis gevul waar hulle bymekaar was. Tonge wat gelyk het soos individuele vuurvlamme het toe tussen hulle verskyn en op elkeen van hulle gaan sit. Almal is toe met die Heilige Gees vervul en soos die Gees vir hulle die vermoë gegee het, het hulle in ander tale begin praat.

Daar het toegewyde Jode uit al die nasies onder die son in Jerusalem gewoon. Die geluid van die stormwind en die stemme het ’n groot skare daar laat saamkom. Hulle was uit die veld geslaan omdat elkeen die gelowiges in hulle eie taal hoor praat het. Hulle was heeltemal uit die veld geslaan. “Hoe is dit moontlik?” het hulle uitgeroep. “Almal wat hier praat, is Galileërs, en tog hoor ons hulle in ons moedertaal praat! Hier is ons – Perse, Mediërs en Elamiete, mense wat in Mesopotamië bly, in Judea, Kappadosië, Pontus en die provinsie Asië, Frigië, Pamfilië, Egipte en die dele van Libië na Sirene se kant toe, besoekers uit Rome – Jode sowel as proseliete, Kretensers en Arabiere. Ons almal hoor hulle in ons eie tale praat oor die groot dinge wat God gedoen het!” Hulle was almal uit die veld geslaan. “Wat kan dit tog beteken?” het party van hulle mekaar gevra.

Maar ander het gespot. “Hulle is maar net dronk!” het hulle gesê.

Toe staan Petrus saam met die elf ander apostels op. Hy het die skare met ’n harde stem toegesprek: “Jode en julle almal wat in Jerusalem woon, neem nou deeglik kennis en luister goed na wat ek gaan sê: Julle moet nou goed luister! Party van julle beweer hierdie mense is dronk. Dis nie waar nie! Dis heeltemal te vroeg daarvoor. Mense is nie nege-uur in die oggend al dronk nie. Nee, wat hier gebeur, is waarvan God deur die profeet Joël gepraat het:

“Só sal dit in die laaste dae wees, sê God:

Ek sal my Gees uitstort op elke mens.

Julle seuns en dogters sal die woord van God verkondig;

julle jongmense sal gesigte sien,

en julle oumense sal drome droom.

Ja, op die mans en vroue wat in my diens staan,

sal Ek in daardie dae my Gees uitstort

en hulle sal my woord verkondig.

En Ek sal wonders gee bo in die hemelruim

en wondertekens onder op die aarde –

bloed en vuur en rookwolke.

Die son sal ’n donker kol word,

en die maan ’n bloedkol,

voordat die groot en heerlike Dag van die Here kom.

Elkeen wat die Naam van die Here aanroep,

sal verlos word.’

“Luister na wat ek gaan sê, geagte mede-Israeliete! Soos julle self weet, het God in die openbaar by julle bevestig dat Jesus van Nasaret die Here is. Dit is bevestig deur kragtige dade, wonders en tekens wat God Hom by julle laat doen het. Maar julle het opgetree soos God dit vooruit bepaal het. Met die hulp van nie-Jode het julle Hom aan die kruis gespyker en vermoor. God het Hom egter van die smarte van die dood gered en Hom opgewek, want die dood kon Hom nie in sy greep hou nie.

“God het Hom opgewek. Ons is almal getuies hiervan. Hy is derhalwe verhoog tot die regterhand van God, en nadat Hy die belofte van die Heilige Gees van die Vader ontvang het, het Hy dit uitgestort soos julle nou sien en hoor.

“Die hele Israel moet dus vir seker weet: God het hierdie Jesus wat julle gekruisig het, Here en Christus gemaak!”

Petrus se woorde het hulle diep geraak. Hulle het toe vir Petrus en die ander apostels gevra: “Geagte volksgenote, wat moet ons doen?”

Petrus antwoord hulle: “Kom tot inkeer en maak reg met God. Laat julle in die Naam van Jesus Christus doop sodat julle sondes vergewe kan word, en julle sal die Heilige Gees as gawe ontvang. Hierdie belofte is bedoel vir julle en julle kinders, en selfs vir die nie-Jode – almal wat die Here ons God sal naderroep.”

Petrus het nog lank aanhou getuig en ’n ernstige beroep op sy

hoorders gedoen: “Laat julle red uit hierdie afgedwaalde geslag!” Dié wat Petrus se boodskap aanvaar het, is gedoop en hulle het lede van die kerk geword. Hulle was so 3 000.

Hulle het hulle volledig gewy aan die leer van die apostels, aan die versorging van mekaar, aan die gemeenskaplike maaltye, en aan gebede. Diep ontsag het oor elke persoon gekom, en die apostels het baie wonders en wondertekens laat plaasvind. Al die gelowiges het gereeld bymekaargekom, en hulle het alles wat hulle besit het, met mekaar gedeel. Hulle het hulle grond en besittings verkoop en die geld aan almal uitgedeel volgens elkeen se behoefte. Hulle het almal elke dag getrou by die tempel bymekaargekom, van huis tot huis die maaltyd van die Here gevier, en hulle kos met jubelende blydschap en in alle opregtheid geëet. Hulle het God deurentyd geprys, en die goedgesindheid van die hele volk geniet. En die Here het elke dag mense wat verlos word, by hulle gevoeg.

Petrus en Johannes was een middag op pad tempel toe. Dit was drie-uur, die gebedstyl. Net tóé word daar ’n man aangedra wat van sy geboorte af lam was. Mense het hom daagliks laat sit by die tempelpoort wat as Mooipoort bekend staan, om by die tempelgangers te bedel. Petrus en Johannes wou net in die tempel ingaan, toe hy hulle sien en ’n bydrae by hulle vra. Petrus kyk hom toe saam met Johannes stip aan, en sê: “Kyk na ons!” Die verlamde man kyk toe na hulle in die verwagting dat hy ’n bydrae gaan kry.

Maar Petrus sê: “Geld het ek nie. Maar wat ek het, dít gee ek vir jou: Op gesag van Jesus Christus van Nasaret, staan op en loop!” Petrus vat die man toe aan sy regterhand en help hom op. En onmiddellik het sy voete en enkels gesond en sterk geword. Hy het opgespring, op sy voete gestaan, en begin rondstap. Daarna, terwyl hy rondstap, huppel en God prys, is hy saam met hulle die tempel in. Die hele volk het gesien hoe hy loop en gehoor hoe hy God prys. Toe hulle hom eien en besef dat dit hý is wat voor die tempel by Mooipoort gesit en bedel het, was hulle heeltemal verstom.

Hulle het van verwondering by die Pilaargang van Salomo saamgedrom terwyl die man gesorg het dat hy by Petrus en Johannes bly. Toe Petrus dit agterkom, het hy soos volg op die mense gereageer: “Geagte Israeliete, wat is so besonders hieraan? Wat kyk julle ons so aan asof ons deur ons eie krag of godsdienstigheid veroorsaak het dat hierdie man kan rondstap? Dis die God van Abraham, die God van Isak, die God van Jakob, die God van ons voorvaders wat met hierdie daad Goddelike eer aan Jesus, sy Dienaar, gee. Dis hierdie selfde Jesus

vir wie julle uitgelewer en voor Pilatus verwerp het, al was Pilatus se uitspraak dat Hy vrygelaat moes word. Julle het hierdie heilige en opregte man verwerp, en eerder geëis dat 'n moordenaar vir julle vrygelaat word. Julle het die Bron van lewe doodgemaak, maar God het Hom uit die dood opgewek! Van Hóm is óns getuies! Die Naam van Jesus het hierdie man se bene weer sterk gemaak – en julle weet hoe verlam hy was. Geloof in die Naam van Jesus het hom heeltemal gesond laat word, hier reg voor julle oë.

“Volksgenote, ek weet dat wat julle aan Jesus gedoen het, in onkunde gebeur het, en dieselfde geld van julle leiers. God was egter besig om te laat gebeur wat al die profete vroeër oor die Messias aangekondig het – dat Hy sou ly. Kom tot inkeer en maak reg met God sodat Hy julle sondes sal uitwis. Dan sal die teenwoordigheid van die Here tye van oplewing tot gevolg hê, en Hy sal Jesus julle Messias weer na julle toe stuur.”

Petrus en Johannes was nog besig om met die mense te praat toe die priesterhoofde, die bevelvoerder van die tempelwag en sommige van die Sadduseërs op hulle afstorm. Hulle was baie ontsteld omdat Petrus en Johannes die volk geleer het en die opstanding uit die dood in Jesus verkondig het. Die tempelwag het hulle gearresteer, en omdat dit al laat was, hulle oornag in die tronk gesit. Tog het baie van die mense wat hulle boodskap gehoor het, gelowig geword. Gevolglik het die getal gelowiges aangegroei tot omtrent 5 000.

Die volgende môre het die priesterhoofde, die leiers, die familiehoofde en die skrifgeleerdes in Jerusalem vergadering gehou. Annas die hoofpriester was daar, asook Kajafas, Johannes, Aleksander en ander familieleden van die hoofpriester. Hulle het die twee apostels voor hulle laat bring en hulle onder druk gesit met die vraag: “Deur watter krag en in watter naam het julle dit reggekry?”

Toe het Petrus, vervul met die Heilige Gees, vir hulle gesê: “Leiers en familiehoofde van ons volk, word ons vandag verhoor oor 'n goeie daad aan 'n verlamde man? Wil julle weet hoe hy gesond gemaak is? Ek wil dit duidelik stel aan julle almal en aan die hele volk Israel dat hy gesond gemaak is in die Naam van Jesus Christus van Nasaret, dié Jesus vir wie julle gekruisig het, maar wat God uit die dood opgewek het. Hy is:

“Dié klip wat deur julle bouers geminag is;
Hý het nou die sluitklip geword.”

“Daar is geen verlossing by iemand anders nie. Daar is geen ander naam op aarde wat mense kan aanroep om verlos te word nie.”

Die raadslede was verbaas toe hulle Petrus en Johannes se waagmoed sien, want hulle het besef dis gewone mense sonder enige besondere opleiding. Hulle het hulle ook herken as mense wat saam met Jesus was. Maar omdat die man wat gesond gemaak is, daar reg by hulle gestaan het, het die raadslede niks gehad om te sê nie. Daarom het hulle Petrus en Johannes uit die raadsaal gestuur en die saak met mekaar bespreek.

“Wat gaan ons met hierdie mans aanvang?” het hulle gevra. “Dit is vir almal wat in Jerusalem woon, duidelik dat ’n onmiskenbare teken deur hulle plaasgevind het, en ook ons kan dit nie ontken nie. Maar om te keer dat dit nog verder onder die volk versprei, kom ons dreig hulle om nie weer met iemand in die Naam van Jesus te praat nie.”

Hulle roep toe die apostels weer in en beveel hulle om glad nie verder iets in die Naam van Jesus te verkondig of te leer nie. Petrus en Johannes het egter in reaksie vir hulle gesê: “Dink julle God wil hê dat ons eerder aan julle gehoorsaam moet wees as aan Hom? Ons kan nie anders as om te praat oor die wonderlike dinge wat ons gesien en gehoor het nie.”

Die Raad het hulle nog verder gedreig. Uiteindelik het hulle hulle egter laat gaan, want hulle het nie geweet hoe om hulle te straf sonder om ’n volksofstand te veroorsaak nie. Almal was inderdaad besig om God te prys vir die wonderteken.

Al die gelowiges was in hart en siel één. Niemand het opgetree asof sy besittings net sy eie was nie, hulle het alles gedeel wat hulle gehad het. Die apostels het kragtige getuienis gegee oor die opstanding van die Here Jesus, en God het sy genade ryklik aan elkeen gegee. Nie een van hulle het ’n tekort gehad nie, want gelowiges wat grond of huise besit het, het dit verkoop en die opbrengs daarvan gebring en vir die apostels gegee. Dié het dit dan uitgedeel volgens elkeen se behoefte.

Die apostels het baie tekens en wonders onder die volk gedoen. Al die gelowiges het gereeld saamgekom in dié deel van die tempel wat as die Pilaargang van Salomo bekend staan. Niemand anders het dit somer gewaag om by hulle aan te sluit nie, al het almal hoë agting vir hulle gehad. Al meer mense het in die Here geglo, groot getalle mans en vroue. Mense het selfs siekes op draagbare en bedmatjies in die straat uitgedra sodat wanneer Petrus verbyloop, sy skaduwee dalk op party van hulle kon val. Skares mense het van die dorpe rondom

Jerusalem af gekom en siekes en mense gebring wat onder onrein geeste gely het. Hulle is almal gesond gemaak.

Die hoofpriester en sy ondersteuners, die Sadduseërs, word toe jaloers en besluit om iets aan die saak te doen. Hulle het die apostels gearrester en in die publieke tronk gestop. Maar 'n engel van die Here het in die nag die tronkdeure oopgemaak, hulle uitgelei en vir hulle gesê: “Gaan tempel toe en verkondig aan die volk die volle boodskap van hierdie nuwe manier van lewe!”

Hulle het geluister en met dagbreek tempel toe gegaan en die mense begin onderrig.

Toe het die hoofpriester en sy amptenare 'n sitting van die Joodse Raad en die leiers van Israel belê. Hulle het die apostels vir die verhoor van die tronk af laat haal. Maar toe die tempelwagte by die tronk kom, was die apostels weg. Hulle het kom rapporteer: “Ons het die tronk toegesluit en ten volle beveilig gekry. Die bewaarders was buite op hulle pos. Toe ons egter die tronkdeure oopmaak, was daar niemand binne nie!” Toe die bevelvoerder van die tempelwag en die priesterhoofde hierdie verslag hoor, was hulle verstom en hulle het gewonder wat aangaan.

Net toe kom daar iemand en sê vir hulle: “Weet julle, die mans vir wie julle in die tronk gesit het, staan in die tempel en onderrig die mense!” Die bevelvoerder het toe saam met die tempelwagte die apostels gaan arrester. Hulle het nie geweld gebruik nie, want hulle was bang die mense steek hulle onder die klippe.

Hulle het hulle voor die Raad gebring, en die hoofpriester het hulle begin ondervra: “Het ons julle nie belet om ooit weer die mense in hierdie Man se Naam te onderrig nie? En nou lê die hele Jerusalem vol van julle leer oor Jesus! Boonop wil julle ons ook nog verantwoordelik hou vir sy dood!”

Petrus en die ander apostels het in reaksie hierop gesê: “Ons moet eerder aan God gehoorsaam wees as aan mense! Die God van ons voorouers het Jesus uit die dood opgewek nadat julle Hom vermoor het deur Hom te kruisig. God het Hom verhoog tot Leier en Verlosser in die regeerposisie reg langs Hom. Hy het dit gedoen om Israel tot inkeer te bring sodat hulle vergifnis van sonde kan ontvang. Óns is getuies hiervan, ons en die Heilige Gees wat God gegee het aan dié wat aan Hom gehoorsaam is.”

Toe die Raad dit hoor, was hulle woedend en het hulle begin planne maak om die apostels dood te maak. Maar een van die Raadslede het opgestaan. Hy was 'n Fariseër met die naam Gamaliël, 'n geëerde

wetskener van Moses en baie gerespekteer deur al die mense. Hy het opgestaan en gevra dat die apostels 'n rukkie moet uitgaan. Hy het sy kollegas toe soos volg toegesprek: “Geagte Israeliete, wees versigtig wat julle met hierdie mans gaan doen! 'n Tyd gelede het ene Teudas na vore getree en daarop aanspraak gemaak dat hy iemand besonders is. Omtrent 400 man het by hom aangesluit. Hy is egter tereggestel, en al sy volgelinge is verstrooi. Dié hele beweging het op niks uitgeloop nie. Na hom, in die tyd van die sensus, was daar Judas die Galileër. Hy het 'n opstand georganiseer en 'n klomp mense is agter hom aan. Ook hý is om die lewe gebring, en al sy volgelinge is uitmekaargejaag. Wat die huidige geval betref, is my aanbeveling daarom aan julle: Laat staan hierdie mense en los hulle uit. As hulle beplanning en aksies mensewerk is, sal daar niks van kom nie. As dit egter van God kom, sal julle hulle nie kan keer nie. Netnou word daar bevind dat julle selfs teen God geveg het!”

Die Raad het sy advies aanvaar. Hulle het die apostels ingeroep en hulle laat slaan. Toe het hulle hulle belet om weer in die Naam van Jesus te praat, en hulle laat gaan.

Die apostels het van die Raad af weggegaan, bly dat God hulle werd geag het om ter wille van die Naam van Jesus vernedering te ly. En elke dag het hulle aangehou om mense in die tempel en van huis tot huis te onderrig en die Goeie Nuus te preek dat Jesus die Messias is.

Groeiende bewegings veroorsaak logistieke nagmerries. Soos honderde, en toe duisende, ja gesê het vir Jesus, het hulle vol vreugde en behoeftes bymekaargekom. Wie sou die klein takies doen, kos versprei, die skottelgoed was en seker maak almal het 'n naamkaartjie? Vir hierdie belangrike werkies het die twaalf apostels 'n klein groepie dienaars gekies wat as die eerste diakens beskou is. Onder hulle was 'n man “vol van geloof en die Heilige Gees”. Sy naam was Stefanus.

Stefanus, 'n man vol van God se genade en krag, het wonders en groot tekens onder die mense gedoen. Op 'n dag het 'n klompie lede van die sogenaamde “Sinagoge van die Vrygelate Slawe” met hom in debat getree. Hulle was Jode wat van Sirene en Aleksandrië, en van die provinsies Silisië en Asië gekom het. Hulle was egter nie opgewasse teen die wysheid en die Gees waarmee hy gepraat het nie.

Toe het hulle mans omgekoop om oor Stefanus te jok en te sê: “Ons het hom beledigende dinge teen Moses en selfs teen God hoor sê.”

Só het hulle dit reggekry om die skares en die familiehoofde en die

skrifkenners op te sweep. Dié het Stefanus gearresteer en hom voor die Joodse Raad gebring. Die vals getuies het gesê: “Hierdie man hou aan om afbrekend van die tempel en van die wet van Moses te praat. Ons het hom regtig hoor sê dat hierdie Jesus van Nasaret die tempel sal verwoes en die tradisies wat Moses vir ons gegee het, sal verander.”

Al die raadslede het stip na Stefanus gekyk en gesien dat sy gesig soos dié van ’n engel skitter.

Die hoofpriester vra toe vir Stefanus: “Is hierdie aanklagte waar?”

Stefanus se antwoord op hierdie vraag was in die vorm van ’n Joodse geskiedenisles oor God se groot storie van verlossing. Toe praat Stefanus van die Regverdige Een, Jesus.

“Julle hardkoppiges! In julle harte is julle nie-Jode. Julle is doof vir die woord van God! Moet julle alewig die Heilige Gees weerstaan? Maar julle voorouers het dit gedoen, en julle doen dit nou ook! Noem een profeet vir wie julle voorouers nie vervolg het nie! Hulle het selfs dié doodgemaak wat die koms van die Regverdige voorspel het – die Messias wat julle uitgelewer en vermoor het. Julle het die wet van God nie uitgeleef nie, alhoewel julle dit deur bemiddeling van engele ontvang het.”

Die Joodse leiers was woedend oor Stefanus se aanklag, en hulle het hulle woede gewys. Maar Stefanus, vol van die Heilige Gees, het aanhou opkyk na die hemel en die heerlijkheid van God gesien. Hy het Jesus in die regeerposisie reg langs God sien staan. “Kyk,” het hy gesê, “ek sien die hemel óóp en die Seun van die Mens in die regeerposisie reg langs God staan!”

Toe het hulle hulle ore toegedruk en hom doodgeskreeu. Soos een man het hulle op hom afgestorm. Hulle het hom uit die stad gesleep en hom met klippe doodgegooi. Die amptelike getuies het hulle klere uitgetrek en by die voete van ’n jong man met die naam Saulus neergesit.

Terwyl hulle besig was om Stefanus te stenig, het hy gebid: “Here Jesus, ontvang my gees.” Hy het op sy knieë neergesak en hard uitgeroep: “Here, moenie hierdie sonde teen hulle hou nie!” Met hierdie woorde het hy gesterf.

Saulus het saamgestem met die teregstelling van Stefanus.

’n Hewige vervolging van die kerk in Jerusalem het daardie dag begin. Al die gelowiges, behalwe die apostels, het uitgewyk na die gebiede van Judea en Samaria. (Godvresende mense het Stefanus

begrawe en hulle het baie oor hom getreur.) Saulus het die kerk oral probeer vernietig. Hy het van huis tot huis gegaan, mans en vroue laat uitsleep en in die tronk laat sit.

Die gelowiges wat uit Jerusalem gevlug het, het so ver as wat hulle gegaan het, die Goeie Nuus verkondig. Filippus het byvoorbeeld na die stad Samaria gegaan en hulle van Christus vertel. Toe die mense hoor wat Filippus verkondig en die wonders sien wat hy doen, het hulle aandagtig na sy boodskap geluister. Onrein geeste het met groot geskreeu uit baie mense uitgegaan, en baie wat verlam en kreupel was, is gesond gemaak. Daar was groot blydschap in daardie stad.

Intussen het Saulus met elke asemteug dreigemente uitgespreek. Hy wou die volgelingen van die Here doodmaak, en het daarom na die hoofpriester toe gegaan. Hy het briewe van hom aan die sinagoges in Damaskus gevra waarin hulle versoek word om hom te help om dié wat aan “Die Pad” behoort, mans én vroue, op te spoor, en hulle geboei na Jerusalem toe te bring. Toe hy op sy sending naby Damaskus kom, het daar skielik ’n lig uit die hemel hom omstraal! Hy het op die grond neergeval en ’n stem vir hom hoor sê: “Saul, Saul, waarom vervolg jy My?”

“Wie is U, Here?” het hy toe gevra.

“Ek is Jesus,” antwoord Hy. “Dis vir Mý wat jy vervolg! Staan nou op en gaan die stad in. Dáár sal vir jou gesê word wat jou te doen staan.”

Die mans saam met hom was sprakeloos van verbasing, want hulle het iemand se stem gehoor, maar niemand gesien nie. Saulus het van die grond af opgestaan en alhoewel sy oë oop was, kon hy niks sien nie. Hulle is Damaskus in terwyl sy reisgenote hom aan die hand lei. Hy was drie dae lank daar sonder om te sien, en hy het ook niks geëet of gedrink nie.

Daar was ’n gelowige in Damaskus met die naam Ananias. Die Here het hom in ’n gesig geroep: “Ananias!”

“Ja, Here!” het hy geantwoord.

Daarop sê die Here vir hom: “Gaan nou Reguitstraat toe, na Judas se huis. Vra daar na Saulus van Tarsus. Want kyk, hy is besig om te bid. Ek het hom in ’n gesig laat sien dat ’n man met die naam Ananias inkom en sy hande op hom sit sodat hy weer kan sien.”

Maar Ananias het geantwoord: “Here, ek het al by baie mense van hierdie man gehoor – watter kwaad hy die gelowiges in Jerusalem aangedoen het! En ons hoor hy het ’n mandaat van die priesterhoofde om al die gelowiges hier in Damaskus te arresteer.”

Die Here het egter vir hom gesê: “Gaan doen wat Ek sê, want Ek het Saulus as my instrument uitgekies om my boodskap uit te dra na volke en konings, en ook aan die volk Israel. Ek sal inderdaad self vir hom wys hoeveel hy vir My moet ly.”

Ananias het toe vertrek en in daardie huis ingegaan. Hy het sy hande op Saulus gesit en gesê: “Broer Saul, die Here het my gestuur, Jesus wat aan jou verskyn het op pad hierheen. Hy het my gestuur sodat jy weer kan sien en met die Heilige Gees vervul kan word.” Onmiddellik het iets soos skille van Saulus se oë afgeval en hy kon weer sien. Hy het opgestaan en is gedoop. Hy het toe kos geëet en sy kragte begin herwin.

Saulus het ’n paar dae by die gelowiges in Damaskus gebly. Hy het Jesus dadelik in die sinagoges begin verkondig – dat Hy die Seun van God is. Almal wat hom gehoor het, was verbaas en het gesê: “Is dit nie dié man wat Jesus se volgelingen in Jerusalem getreiter het nie? Dis mos presies waarvoor hy hierheen gekom het: om hulle geboei voor die priesterhoofde te bring!” Saulus se prediking het al hoe kragtiger geword en het die Damaskus-Jode in die war gebring deur te bewys dat Jesus die Christus is.

Na etlike dae het dié Jode saamgesweer om Saulus te vermoor. Hulle komplot het egter aan Saulus uitgelek. Dag en nag het hulle die stad se poorte dopgehou om hom te vermoor. Maar sy volgelingen het hom in ’n mandjie deur ’n opening in die stadsmuur laat afsak.

Toe Saulus in Jerusalem aankom, het hy probeer om by die gelowiges aan te sluit, maar almal was bang vir hom. Hulle kon nie glo dat hy ’n gelowige is nie. Barnabas het hom toe na die apostels toe gevat, en vir hulle vertel hoe Saulus op pad na Damaskus die Here gesien het. Barnabas het ook vertel dat die Here met Saulus gepraat het, en hoe hy in Damaskus openlik in die Naam van Jesus gepreek het. Saulus het toe oral in Jerusalem saam met hulle rondgegaan en openlik in die Naam van die Here gepreek. Hy het ook met Griekssprekende Jode gepraat en met hulle geredeneer, maar hulle het planne beraam om hom te vermoor. Toe die gelowiges dit agterkom, het hulle hom Sesarea toe gevat en hom van daar na Tarsus toe weggestuur.

Die kerk het deur die hele Judea, Galilea en Samaria vrede gehad. Die gelowiges is opgebou en het in ontsag vir die Here geleef, en hulle is deur die Heilige Gees versterk. Op hierdie manier het hulle getalle aangegroei.

Die meeste van die nuwe Christene was Jode, maar God se storie van

In Sesarea was daar 'n Romeinse weermagoffisier met die naam Kornelius, 'n offisier oor honderd man van die Italiaanse Regiment. Hy het toegewy aan die God van Israel geleef en het ontsag vir Hom gehad, hy en sy hele huishouding. Hy het baie bydraes vir die armes onder die Joodse volk gegee en hy het deurentyd tot God gebid. Een middag teen drie-uur het hy in 'n gesig duidelik 'n engel van God na hom toe sien kom wat vir hom sê: “Kornelius!”

Kornelius het hom aangestaar en bang geword en gevra: “Wat is dit, Meneer?”

Die engel het hom geantwoord: “Jou gebede en wat jy vir die armes doen, het God opgeval! Stuur daarom nou dadelik mans na Joppe toe en laat daar 'n sekere Simon haal. Sy noemnaam is Petrus. Hy is 'n gas by 'n ander Simon, 'n leerlooier. Sy huis is by die see.”

Toe die engel wat met hom gepraat het, vertrek, het Kornelius twee van sy huiswerkers en een van sy lyfwagte, self 'n soldaat wat aan God toegewy geleef het, geroep. Hy het hulle alles vertel en hulle Joppe toe gestuur.

Die volgende dag, toe Kornelius se afvaardiging al naby die dorp was, het Petrus dakstoep toe gegaan om te bid. Dit was teen twaalfuur die middag, en hy het honger geword en wou eet. Terwyl hulle die ete klaarmaak, het hy in geestesvervoering geraak. Hy het die hemel oop gesien en iets soos 'n groot doek wat aan sy vier punte neergelaat word en afkom grond toe. In die doek was allerhande diere, reptiele en voëls. 'n Stem sê toe vir hom: “Staan op, Petrus! Slag en eet!”

“Nooit nie, Here!” het Petrus gesê. “Ek het nog nooit iets wat onrein is, geëet nie.”

Toe kom die stem weer: “Wat God rein gemaak het, mag jy nie onrein ag nie.”

Dit het drie keer gebeur. Toe is die doek weer in die hemel opgetrek.

Petrus was verdwaas. Wat kon die gesig tog beteken? Juis op daardie stadium kry die mans wat deur Kornelius gestuur is, die huis en hulle staan by die voordeur. Hulle was op soek na die huis van Simon en vra toe of Simon met die noemnaam Petrus daar 'n gas is.

Terwyl Petrus nog wonder oor die gesig, het die Gees vir hom gesê: “Hier is drie mans wat jou soek. Gaan ondertoe en moenie huiwer om saam met hulle te gaan nie, want Ék het hulle gestuur.”

Petrus het toe ondertoe gegaan en vir die mans gesê: “Hier is ek, dis vir my wat julle soek. Waarom is julle hier?”

Hulle het geantwoord: “Kornelius, ’n Romeinse offisier oor honderd man, het ons gestuur. Hy is ’n opregte man en een wat ontsag vir God het, en die hele Joodse volk het hoë agting vir hom. ’n Heilige engel het hom opdrag gegee om u na sy huis te laat haal en dat hy moet luister na wat u te sê het.” Petrus nooi hulle toe vir die nag in.

Die volgende dag het hy saam met hulle vertrek, en ’n paar van die medegelowiges in Joppe het saam met hom gegaan. Hulle het die volgende dag in Sesarea aangekom. Kornelius het hulle al verwag en het sy familie en naby vriende reeds saamgeroep. Toe Petrus die huis inkom, het Kornelius voor sy voete neergeval en hom begin aanbid. Maar Petrus het hom opgehelp en gesê: “Staan op! Ek is ’n mens net soos jy!”

En terwyl hy met hom praat, gaan hulle binne, en kry die klomp mense wat daar bymekaar is. Petrus sê toe vir hulle: “Julle weet dat ’n Jood nie met iemand van ’n ander volk kontak mag hê of by hom in die huis mag kom nie, maar God het vir my gewys dat ek geen mens as onrein mag beskou nie.”

Petrus het ook gesê hy weet God het nie witbroodjies nie, maar dat Hy mense van alle etniese groepe en nasies uitnooi om die evangelie deur Jesus die Messias te aanvaar. Soos Petrus die evangelieboodskap verduidelik en die eerste nie-Joodse gehoor in geloof en berou reageer, het daar iets wonderliks gebeur: die geskenk van die Heilige Gees is op hulle uitgestort, net soos op die Joodse gelowiges tydens die Pinkster.

Terwyl die kerk gegroei het, het dit ook vervolging deur Herodes Agrippa I, die kleinseun van die Herodes die Grote (wat regeer het toe Jesus gebore is) en nefie van Herodes Antipas (wat Johannes die Doper se kop afgekap het) in die gesig gestaar.

In dié tyd het koning Herodes Agrippa party van dié wat aan die kerk behoort, laat arresteer en hulle mishandel. Hy het Jakobus, die broer van Johannes, met ’n swaard laat vermoor. Toe Herodes sien dat dit by die Jode byval vind, het hy nog verder gegaan deur ook Petrus tydens die Fees van die Ongesuurde Brood te laat arresteer. Hy het hom in die tronk gesit en deur vier afdelings van vier soldate elk laat bewaak. Herodes wou hom ná Paasfees in die openbaar verhoor.

So is Petrus dan in die tronk bewaak. Die kerk het aanhoudend vir hom tot God gebid.

Die nag voordat Herodes hom in die openbaar sou verhoor, het Petrus tussen twee soldate geslaap terwyl hy met twee kettings geboei was en ander wagte die tronkdeur bewaak. Meteens staan daar ’n

engel van die Here by Petrus, en 'n lig skyn in die sel. Die engel stoot toe aan Petrus se sy, en maak hom wakker en sê: “Staan gou op!” Die boeie het van sy polse afgeval.

Toe sê die engel vir hom: “Maak vas jou belt en trek jou sandale aan.” Hy het so gemaak. Daarna sê die engel vir hom: “Trek jou bo-kleed aan en kom agter my aan.” Petrus het hom uit die sel gevolg. Hy het nie besef dat die optrede van die engel werklikheid was nie, maar het gedink hy sien 'n gesig. Hulle is by die eerste wag verby en ook by die tweede, en toe hulle by die ysterhek kom wat na die stad toe lei, het dit vanself vir hulle oopgegaan. Hulle het buitentoe gegaan en 'n ent met die straat afgestap. Toe het die engel Petrus skielik verlaat.

Uiteindelik dring dit tot Petrus deur wat met hom gebeur het en hy sê vir homself: “Nou besef ek eers regtig dat die Here sy engel gestuur het en my uit die mag van Herodes gered het en van die kwaad wat die Jode gehoop het om my aan te doen!”

Toe dit vir hom duidelik geword het, is hy na die huis van Maria, die ma van Johannes (sy noemnaam is Markus), waar 'n taamlike groep saam was en gebid het. Hy het aan die buitedeur geklop, en 'n diensmeisie met die naam Rodé het kom hoor wie dit is. Toe sy Petrus se stem herken, het sy van blydschap nie die deur oopgemaak nie, maar binnetoe gehardloop en uitgeroep dat Petrus by die buitedeur staan!

Maar hulle het vir haar gesê: “Jy is skoon van jou wysie af!” Toe sy egter daarmee volhou, het hulle gesê: “Dan is dit seker Petrus se engel.”

Intussen het Petrus weer geklop. Toe hulle oopmaak en hom sien, was hulle baie verbaas. Hy het met sy hand vir hulle beduie om stil te raak en vir hulle vertel hoe die Here hom uit die tronk uitgelei het. “Vertel vir Jakobus en die ander gelowiges wat gebeur het,” het hy gesê. Hy is buitentoe, en het elders heen vertrek.

Toe dit dag word, was daar groot ontsteltenis onder die soldate oor wat van Petrus geword het. Herodes Agrippa het hom laat soek. Toe hulle hom nie kon kry nie, het hy die wagte verhoor en bevel gegee dat hulle tereggestel word.

Hierna het Herodes van Judea na Sesarea toe gegaan en 'n tyd daar gebly. Herodes was destyds baie kwaad vir die mense van Tirus en Sidon. Daarom het hulle 'n gesamentlike afvaardiging na hom toe gestuur met 'n vredesvoorstel omdat hulle stede vir kos van Herodes se land afhanklik was. Hulle het Blastus, die koning se kamerbediende, oorgehaal om vir hulle 'n oudiënsie by Herodes te kry.

Op die vasgestelde dag het Herodes sy ampsklere aangetrek, op sy

verhoog gaan sit en hulle in die openbaar toegesprek. Die mense het hom toegejuig: “Dit is die stem van ’n god, nie van ’n mens nie!” Onmiddellik het ’n engel van die Here Herodes getref omdat hy die verering aanvaar en nie aan God gegee het nie. Hy is deur wurms opgevrete en het gesterf.

Maar die Goeie Nuus het verder versprei en baie het tot geloof gekom.

Saulus en sy mentor Barnabas het ’n jaar deurgebring om die eerste hoofsaaklik nie-Joodse kerk in Antiogië te bedien, waar die gelowiges vir die eerste keer “Christene” genoem is. Die Here het hulle van daar af geroep vir hulle sendingdiens. Saulus en Barnabas, eers vergesel deur Johannes Markus – Barnabas se nefie wat later die Evangelie van Markus sou skryf – het begin reis en Jesus deur die hele Klein-Asië verkondig. Dit was ook gedurende hierdie tyd dat Saulus se naam na Paulus verander is. Omdat God se Gees hulle gelei het, het Saulus (Paulus) en sy kollegas dapper oor Jesus gepraat oral waar hulle gegaan het. Min het hulle geweet wat hulle sou moes deurmaak vir die Goeie Nuus.

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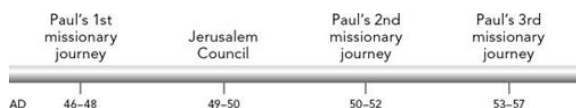
Paul’s Mission

NOW IN THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos.

There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.”



Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.”

Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!

“The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification¹ you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.”

As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.

Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

When visiting a new city, Paul and Barnabas typically went first to the Jewish synagogue. Not only did they feel that doing so was God’s directed priority, but the synagogue’s building and regularly scheduled meetings provided a convenient location and designated time for proclaiming the gospel. The Good News was often met with mixed

results among the Jews— some gratefully embraced the message while others rejected it out of disbelief.

Within the mainstream Gentile community, some of the resistance to God's Good News was motivated by pure economics: each new follower of Jesus meant one less buyer of charms and idol merchandise, which was big business in many cities. Some of the opposition was political, as each convert subtracted from the number and clout of the leading religious groups. Much of it was personal, since believing in Jesus changed people and thus threatened the status quo.

At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, where they continued to preach the gospel.

In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing

you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

Paul felt the full weight of opposition as he challenged Gentiles and Jews to recognize Jesus as the long-promised Messiah and God’s own Son. Shortly after being mistaken by the crowd of Gentiles in Lystra as a “god,” some Jews were able to turn the tide of public opinion against the apostles. Paul was attacked by a mob, who stoned him and left him for dead. Christians gathered around him and prayed. Paul’s strength was revived and he walked back into the city!

The next day Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe, the last city they would visit on this first missionary journey. After retracing their steps, encouraging the new churches they had founded earlier, they returned to their home base in Antioch. A year or so later, the developing Christian movement faced a critical issue. Some of the Jewish believers insisted that Gentile converts keep the Law of Moses, especially circumcision — the physical sign of God’s promise to the Jews. A council of Christian leaders gathered in Jerusalem. Paul argued that Gentiles didn’t need to become Jews in order to be saved, and eventually he (along with the support of Peter) persuaded the others.

After this, Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement; Barnabas wanted to reinstate John Mark to their team, but Paul didn’t feel that was wise since Barnabas’s young cousin had deserted them previously. Paul and Barnabas decided to part company. Silas joined Paul for the journey through Asia Minor, and Timothy joined them in Lystra. It was apparently at Troas, on the western coast of Asia Minor, that Luke — the author of both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts — joined the traveling missionaries. Also while at Troas, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia imploring them, “Come here, help us!” Believing that vision to be from God, Paul and his companions turned northwest across the Aegean Sea toward the city of Philippi, a Roman colony and leading Macedonian city. They soon were in

trouble again.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he

thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself! We are all here!”

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole household.

When it was daylight, the magistrates sent their officers to the jailer with the order: “Release those men.” The jailer told Paul, “The magistrates have ordered that you and Silas be released. Now you can leave. Go in peace.”

But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.

If the Good News about Jesus really was the answer to humanity’s greatest questions, some people were not asking the right questions. Opposition showed up at every turn in the road. Paul’s legal trump card, his Roman citizenship, certainly helped in some situations. But still there were mobs to face (or avoid), anger to contend with and bonds to post when “disturbing the peace” was the most convenient crime to hang around Paul’s neck. None of this was easy, but Paul considered trouble an opportunity to trust God and never looked back.

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis

and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: “These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.” When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go.

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

In Berea, Paul found an eager and receptive audience, although Jewish opponents stirred up the crowds against Paul once again. So he traveled on to Athens, where he confronted a not-so-receptive audience—the philosophical thinkers of the day. Seeing an altar dedicated “to an unknown god,” Paul challenged his audience to consider the living God and Creator, who has spoken eloquently through the life of the risen Messiah. A few people politely nodded, some laughed and a few believed in Jesus. Paul’s mission was to find key people in each city who could lead a new community of believers, a “church,” and help those in need through their deeds of mercy and love. He went to Corinth and a new Christian community was soon born.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius² had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker

as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. But when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent of it. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”

Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized.

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.” So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

As was the customary way of communicating, Paul composed letters on scrolls to the churches he had established. These “epistles” are collected in Bibles today as part of the New Testament. Christians read them still as inspired and reliable words of instruction on how to know and live for God.

While he was in Corinth, Paul wrote to believers in Thessalonica, probably around AD 51. Thessalonica was a bustling port city of 200,000 people (the largest population in Macedonia). With much emotion, Paul recalled the believers’ response to him and the gospel message during his recent visit there, his longing to see them again and his encouragement when he received a good report about them from Timothy. Then Paul in turn encouraged them, in the midst of their trials and persecution, explaining that the living Messiah would return someday.

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

Grace and peace to you.

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia — your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed — God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. Instead, we were like young children among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of

our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, did, again and again — but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify³ you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

If ever a place was hostile to Jesus' way of holiness, faith and joy, it was the city of Corinth. Paganism owned this cosmopolitan city with its wild night-life and upscale markets. Yet Paul's message was steady and sure: once you've explored all the human wisdom collected by the best minds in Greece, there still remain problems only Jesus can answer. Paul's debating skills and encyclopedic knowledge of Roman and religious law helped him navigate past petty charges the Jewish leaders made against him. Whether standing in the synagogue or the public square, Paul spoke what he knew: Jesus, who died and rose again, is the key to peace with God; only he fills the God-shaped vacuum in every heart.

While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. "This man," they charged, "is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law."

Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to them, "If you Jews were making a complaint about some misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law— settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things." So he drove them off. Then the crowd there turned on Sosthenes the synagogue leader and beat him in front of the proconsul; and Gallio showed no concern whatever.

Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch.

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

Everywhere Paul traveled, he saw God's power at work in people's lives. In some places he witnessed spiritual breakthroughs when many people believed; in other places he was chased or beaten. He trusted that God would bring good out of it all. Although Paul was a tireless traveling missionary, he did settle into extended periods of ministry at a few strategic major cities. This had been the case at Antioch and Corinth. And now the apostle was about to spend more than two years at Ephesus—the leading commercial center of Asia Minor and the guardian of the temple of Artemis (the Greek name for the Roman goddess Diana), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus.

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.⁴ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the

whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”

When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: “Fellow Ephesians, doesn’t all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.” After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia.

Near the end of Paul’s two-plus years in Ephesus, he wrote a very

direct letter to the Christians in Corinth. Although this wasn't the first letter he had written them, we know it as "First Corinthians" because it's the first of two letters from Paul to the Corinthians found in the New Testament. In the city of Corinth, followers of Jesus had to work hard at keeping the faith. Idol worship was popular, as Corinth was home to at least a dozen pagan temples. At one time more than a thousand temple prostitutes "officiated" at Aphrodite's temple alone. Living out the truth was not easy. And, unfortunately, rather than facing the challenges of their culture as a united "body," the believers at Corinth were splintered into factions. Paul's letter spoke eloquently to issues they faced, concluding with a reminder that Jesus has triumphed over death.

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside.

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

My dear friends, flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is

one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.⁶

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. All the brothers and sisters here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

If anyone does not love the Lord, let that person be cursed! Come, Lord!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you.

My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

How does a person please God? Many religions teach that one must appease God/gods with offerings or superstitious rituals. Yet God's story abolishes our religious to-do lists. Faith in Jesus is God's way for us, and delight in Jesus is what God asks of us. When religious people become followers of Jesus, they are freed from sin and legalistic rituals.

The Christians in Galatia were coming under the influence of Jewish Christians who believed that a number of the ceremonial practices of Judaism remained obligatory for followers of Jesus. Paul wrote to the churches in this part of Asia Minor to warn them that they were in reality deserting God and turning to a false gospel. He forcefully proclaimed that people cannot be saved by performing good works in general or by adhering to the Law of Moses in particular. We must come to God trusting in Jesus alone. Only then will we experience freedom.

Paul, an apostle — sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead — and all the brothers and sisters with me,

To the churches in Galatia:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works

of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain — if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?

All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because “the righteous will live by faith.”

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Paul had never visited the church in Rome, which included both Jewish and Gentile Christians, though Gentiles comprised the majority. Around AD 57, he wrote them an amazing letter to stabilize their understanding of God's story of Jesus the Messiah and to give them courage under pressure. This brilliant letter mapped out foundational truths of Christianity and answered tough questions about sin, grace, the Jewish law and the never-ending power of God's love.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed — a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his

grace through the redemption⁷ that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,⁸ through the shedding of his blood — to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished — he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

“Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ

died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation — but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba*,⁹ Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it

cheerfully.

Since I have been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord's people there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this contribution, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there, so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

After traveling through Macedonia and encouraging many people there, Paul set his sights on Jerusalem. He felt urgently compelled by God to return there, even though he had an inkling that hardship awaited him. Luke the physician was traveling with Paul at this time and recorded in the book of Acts a breathtaking first-person account of their final shared experiences.

1Justified, justification: The process by which one is made acceptable in the sight of God. Justification occurs through faith that Jesus died to pay the price for human sin; thus, Jesus himself justifies each person who believes in him.

2Claudius: The emperor of Rome.

3Sanctify, sanctification: The process of growing continually closer to God and taking on his characteristics. Sanctification is essential to the Christian life as evidence of and an effect of the

spiritual reality of justification.

4Drachmas: A drachma was a silver coin worth about a day's wages.

5Cephas: That is, Peter.

6One abnormally born: That is, Paul was not part of the original group of apostles and had not lived with Christ as the others had.

7Redemption: The release of humanity from the debt owed to God for disobedience and the resulting restoration of a relationship with him.

8Atonement: To make amends to God for wrongdoing (sin) through a sacrifice. In the Old Testament, crops or livestock were offered or sacrificed for atonement; in the New Testament, the death of Jesus was the sacrifice that pays for the sins of his people.

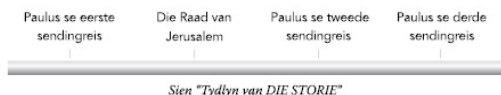
9Abba: Aramaic for Father.

Paulus se sending

In die gemeente in Antiogië was daar profete en leraars: Barnabas, Simeon met die noemnaam Niger, Lucius van Sirene, Manaen, wat saam met koning Herodes Antipas grootgeword het, en Saulus. 'n Keer toe hulle bymekaar was om die Here te dien en om te vas, het die Heilige Gees gesê: “Sonder Barnabas en Saulus vir My af om die werk te doen waarvoor Ek hulle geroep het.” Ná nog vas en gebed is hulle die hande opgelê en het die gemeente hulle weggestuur.

Deur die Heilige Gees uitgestuur, het Barnabas en Saulus na Seleukië toe afgegaan en daarvandaan na die eiland Siprus toe oorgevaar. In Salamis aangekom, het hulle die woord van God in die Joodse sinagoges verkondig. Hulle het Johannes as helper gehad.

Daarna het hulle die hele eiland deur gegaan tot by Pafos, waar hulle 'n Joodse towenaar teëgekom het, 'n vals profeet met die naam Barjesus. Hy was saam met die goewerneur, Sergius Paulus, wat 'n verstandige man was. Die goewerneur het Barnabas en Saulus genooi om die woord van God van hulle te hoor. Die towenaar Elimas (sy naam word só vertaal) het hulle egter teengestaan omdat hy die goewerneur wou weghou van die Christelike geloof. Maar Saulus, dit is Paulus, vol van die Heilige Gees, het hom stip aangekyk en gesê: “Duiwelskind! Jy loop oor van al wat skelmstreek en bedrogspul is! Vyand van alles wat reg is! Sal jy nooit ophou om die reguit paaie van die Here vol kronkels te maak nie? Nou is die strawwende hand van die Here op jou. Jy sal blind word en die son 'n tyd lank nie sien nie.”



Onmiddellik het hy net mistigheid en donkerte gesien, en hy het rondgetas en gesoek na iemand om sy gids te wees. Toe die goewerneur sien wat gebeur het, het hy gelowig geword, en hy was verstom oor die Christelike leer.

Paulus en sy reisgenote het van Pafos af weggevaar en by Perge in

Pamfilië vasgemeer. Daar het Johannes hulle verlaat en teruggegaan Jerusalem toe. Barnabas en Paulus het egter die reis van Perge af voortgesit en in Antiogië in Pisidië aangekom. Op die Sabbatdag het hulle die sinagoge binnegegaan en gaan sit. Ná die gebruikelike voorlesing uit die wet en die profete het die raadslede van die sinagoge hulle laat weet: “Broers, as julle vir ons ’n woord van bemoediging het, kom praat!”

Paulus het opgestaan en met ’n handbeweging aandag gevra en gesê: “Geagte Israeliete en julle ander wat vir die ware God ontsag het, luister.

“Die mense in Jerusalem en hulle leiers het die uitsprake van die profete in vervulling laat gaan deur Jesus tot die dood te veroordeel. Hulle het Hom nie herken nie en ook nie besef dat dit Hy is oor wie die profete geskryf het nie, al word dit elke Sabbatdag voorgelees. Hulle kon geen grond vir die doodvonnis kry nie, maar nogtans het hulle Pilatus gevra om Hom te laat doodmaak. Nadat hulle alles gedoen het wat oor sy lyding in die Skrif geskryf staan, het hulle Hom van die kruis afgehaal en in ’n grafkamer neergelê. Maar God het Hom uit die dood opgewek! Jesus het in die loop van baie dae aan die mense verskyn wat saam met Hom van Galilea na Jerusalem gegaan het. Hierdie mense is nou sy getuies by die volk.

“En nou verkondig ek en Barnabas hierdie Goeie Nuus aan julle: God het die belofte aan ons voorgeslagte waar laat word. Hy het dit vir ons, hulle nageslag, vervul deur Jesus te laat opstaan.

“Daarom, geagte volksgenote, moet julle goed weet wat nou aan julle verkondig word: vergewing van sondes deur Jesus! Julle kon nie deur die wet van Moses God se vryspraak verkry nie, maar deur Jesus word elkeen wat glo, deur God vry gespreek.”

Terwyl Paulus en Barnabas die sinagoge verlaat, het die mense hulle gevra om die volgende Sabbatdag meer van dié dinge te vertel. Ná die sinagogediens het baie van die Jode en van die nie-Jode wat proseliete geword het, saam met Paulus en Barnabas gegaan. Dié twee het met hulle gepraat en hulle aangemoedig om op die genade van God te bly vertrou.

Die volgende Sabbatdag het byna die hele stad bymekaargekom om hulle die woord van die Here te hoor preek. Toe die Jode die skares sien, het hulle jaloers geword. Hulle het Paulus beledig en alles teengestaan wat hy gesê het.

Paulus en Barnabas het toe reguit vir hulle gesê: “Die woord van God moes eerste aan julle verkondig word. Maar omdat julle dit verwerp en daarmee beslis dat julle die ewige lewe nie werd is nie, wend ons ons nou tot die nie-Jode. Immers met hierdie woorde het die Here ons ’n opdrag gegee:

“Ek het Jou gegee as ’n lig vir die nie-Joodse nasies sodat Jy verlossing kan bring tot in die uithoeke van die aarde.”

Toe die nie-Jode dit hoor, was hulle baie bly en hulle het die woord van die Here toegejuig. Almal wat vir die ewige lewe bestem was, het gelowig geword.

Die woord van die Here het deur daardie hele streek versprei. Maar die Jode het vooraanstaande vroue wat vir die ware God ontsag gehad het, asook toonaangewende burgers van die stad, opgeswee. Hulle het ’n betoging teen Paulus en Barnabas bewerk, en hulle uit die streek weggejaag. Hulle het toe, as protes teen die stad, die stof van hulle voete afgeskud en Ikonium toe gegaan. Die gelowiges was vol blydschap en vol van die Heilige Gees.

Wanneer Paulus en Barnabas by ’n nuwe stad gekom het, het hulle gewoonlik eerste na die Joodse sinagoge gegaan. Hulle het dit nie net gedoen omdat hulle dit as ’n Goddelike opdrag gesien het nie, maar ook omdat die sinagoge se gebou en gereelde byeenkomste ’n gerieflike plek en tyd gegee het waar hulle die evangelie kon verkondig. Die Goeie Nuus is dikwels met gemengde reaksies ontvang deur die Jode – sommige het die nuus met dankbaarheid ontvang terwyl ander dit in ongelooft verwerp het.

Binne die hoofstroom nie-Joodse gemeenskap was sommige van die teenstand teen God se Goeie Nuus suiwer ekonomies gemotiveerd: elke nuwe volgeling van Jesus het een minder koper van afgodstoebehoere beteken, wat ’n florerende besigheid was in die stede. Sommige van die teenstand was polities gemotiveerd, aangesien elke bekeerling een minder aanhanger van die godsdienstige groepe beteken. Baie daarvan was persoonlik, aangesien geloof in Christus mense verander het en die status quo bedreig het.

In Ikonium het dit ook so gegaan. Paulus en Barnabas het weer die Joodse sinagoge binnegegaan en daar gepreek, en ’n groot aantal Jode en Grieke het gelowig geword. Maar die Jode wat nie oortuig geraak

het nie, het die gemoedere van die nie-Jode opgesweep en hulle teen die gelowiges aangehits.

Die apostels het 'n taamlike tyd daar deurgebring en in vertroue op die Here met vrymoedigheid gepreek. Die Here het ook die waarheid van die boodskap van sy genade bevestig deur te gee dat tekens en wonders deur die apostels se toedoen plaasvind. Die mense in die stad was verdeeld: party het hulle by die Jode geskaar en party by die apostels.

Op 'n stadium het die nie-Jode en die Jode, saam met hulle leiers, beplan om die apostels aan te rand en met klippe dood te gooi. Toe die apostels dit agterkom, het hulle na Listra en Derbe en die Likaonië-omgewing gevlug. Dáár het hulle toe die Goeie Nuus verkondig.

In Listra was daar 'n man wat sy voete nie kon gebruik nie. Van sy geboorte af was hy verlam en kon hy nooit loop nie. Hy het geluister terwyl Paulus praat. Paulus het stip na hom gekyk en gesien dat hy die geloof het om gesond gemaak te word. Toe het hy met 'n harde stem gesê: “Op jou voete!” Die man het opgespring en begin rondstap.

Toe die skare sien wat Paulus gedoen het, roep hulle in Likaonies uit: “Die gode het met mensliggame na ons toe afgekom!” Hulle het Barnabas “Zeus” begin noem en Paulus, omdat hy die een was wat die praatwerk gedoen het, “Hermes”. Die Zeustempel was net buite die stad. Die priester van die tempel het bulle en blomkranse na die stadspoort toe gevat, en hy het gereedgemaak om saam met die skare offers aan die apostels te bring.

Toe die apostels Barnabas en Paulus daarvan hoor, het hulle hulle klere geskeur en tussen die skare ingespring en geskreeu: “Mense, waarom doen julle dit? Ons is mense, net soos julle. Ons bring vir julle die Goeie Nuus dat julle hierdie nikswerd kamstige gode moet laat staan en julle tot die lewende God bekeer. Dit is Hy wat die hemel en die aarde en die see en alles wat in hulle bestaan, gemaak het. In vorige geslagte het Hy die ander nasies toegelaat om hulle eie koers te kies, maar tog het Hy duidelike getuienis gegee dat dit Hy is wat die goeie dinge gee: Hy het vir julle reën gegee van die hemel af, en oeste op hulle tyd; Hy het julle volop kos gegee en in julle harte volop vreugde.” Maar selfs met hierdie woorde kon die apostels skaars keer dat die mense offers aan hulle bring.

Paulus het die volle gewig van teenstand ervaar toe hy die nie-Jode en Jode uitgedaag het om Jesus as die beloofde Messias en God se eie Seun te herken. Kort nadat die skare van nie-Jode in Listra hom verkeerdelik aangesien het vir 'n “god”, het 'n klompie Jode dit

reggekry om die publiek se opinie oor die apostels te verander. Paulus is deur 'n skare aangeval; hulle het hom gestenig en vir dood agtergelaat. Christene het om hom gaan staan en gebid. Paulus het sy krag herwin en teruggestap na die stad.

Die volgende dag het Paulus en Barnabas na Derbe vertrek, die laaste stad wat hulle sou besoek op hulle eerste sendingreis. Nadat hulle teruggereis het met die pad waarlangs hulle gekom het en die nuwe kerke wat hulle gestig het, bemoedig het, het hulle teruggekeer na hulle basis in Antiogië. 'n Jaar of twee later het die ontwikkelende Christen-beweging voor 'n krisis te staan gekom. Sommige Joodse gelowiges het daarop aangedring dat die nie-Joodse bekeerlinge die Wet van Moses moes onderhou, veral die een oor die besnydenis – 'n fisieke teken van God se belofte aan die Jode. 'n Raad van Christenleiers het in Jerusalem bymekaargekom. Paulus het geredeneer dat nie-Jode nie Jode hoef te word om gered te kon word nie, en uiteindelik het hy (met die ondersteuning van Petrus) daarin geslaag om die ander te oortuig.

Hierna het Paulus en Barnabas 'n groot meningsverskil gehad; Barnabas wou Johannes Markus weer deel maak van hulle groep, maar Paulus het nie gedink dit is wys nie aangesien Barnabas se jong nefie hulle vantevore in die steek gelaat het. Paulus en Barnabas het besluit dat hulle weë moet skei. Silas het by Paulus aangesluit in sy reis deur Klein-Asië, en Timoteus het in Listra by hulle aangesluit. By Troas, aan die westelike kus van Klein-Asië, het Lukas – die outeur van beide die Lukas-evangelie en Handeling – by die sendingreis aangesluit. Terwyl hulle in Troas was, het Paulus ook 'n visioen gehad van 'n man in Masedonië wat hulle smeek om te kom help. Omdat hy geglo het die visioen kom van God af, het Paulus en sy reisgenote noordwes gedraai en oor die Middellandse See na Filippi gereis, 'n Romeinse kolonie en Masedoniese stad. Hulle was gou weer in die moeilikheid.

Op die Sabbatdag is ons na die rivier buite die stadspoort, waar ons gereken het daar 'n Joodse bidplek sou wees. Ons het gaan sit en met die vroue gepraat wat daar bymekaar was. Een van dié wat geluister het, was 'n vrou met die naam Lidia – iemand wat reeds die ware God vereer het. Sy was 'n handelaar van pers wolmateriaal en was van die stad Tiatira afkomstig. Die Here het haar hart oopgemaak sodat sy ontvanklik was vir Paulus se boodskap. Sy en die ander lede van haar huishouding is toe gedoop. Daarna het sy ons oorgenooi en gesê: “Aangesien julle daarvan oortuig is dat ek in die Here glo, kom bly

dan by my oor.” En sy het aangehou tot ons ingestem het.

Terwyl ons eendag na die bidplek toe op pad was, het ’n slavin met ’n waarsêersgees ons raakgeloop. Deur haar waarsêery het sy vir haar eienaars baie geld ingebring. Sy het agter Paulus en ons aangeloop en aanhoudend geskreeu: “Hierdie mense is diensknegte van God die Allerhoogste! Hulle verkondig aan julle die pad na verlossing.” Sy het dit vir baie dae gedoen totdat Paulus dit nie langer kon hou nie. Hy het omgedraai en vir die gees gesê: “Ek beveel jou in die Naam van Jesus Christus: Gaan uit haar uit!” Die gees het oombliklik uit haar uitgegaan.

Toe haar eienaars sien dat hulle vooruitsig om geld te maak verdwyn het, het hulle vir Paulus en Silas gegryp en hulle na die leiers op die stadsplein gesleep. Hulle het hulle voor die stadsbestuur gebring en gesê: “Hierdie mense maak moeilikheid in ons stad; hulle is Jode. Hulle leer vir ons gebruike wat ons, omdat ons Romeine is, nie kan aanvaar of navolg nie.”

Die skare het toe ook teen hulle saamgestaan. Die stadsowerhede het hulle klere van hulle laat afskeur en beveel dat hulle met stokke geslaan word. Hulle het baie houe gekry, en toe is hulle in die tronk gegooi. Die tronkbewaarder het opdrag gekry om seker te maak dat hulle nie ontsnap nie. In reaksie op hierdie bevel het die tronkbewaarder hulle in die binneste sel gegooi en hulle voete in houtblokke vasgekleem.

Teen middernag was Paulus en Silas besig om te bid en tot lof van God te sing. Die ander gevangenes het na hulle geluister. Skielik kom daar ’n groot aardbewing sodat die fundamente van die tronk geskud het. Al die tronkdeure het oopgevlieg en al die gevangenes se kettings het losgekom!

Die tronkbewaarder het wakker geword en die tronkdeure wawyd oop sien staan. Hy het aanvaar die gevangenes het ontsnap, en sy swaard uitgetrek om homself dood te maak. Maar Paulus het met ’n harde stem geskreeu: “Moenie jouself iets aandoen nie! Ons is nog almal hier!”

Die bewaarder het toe ’n lig gevra en die sel ingestorm. Hy het begin bewe en voor Paulus en Silas neergeval. Hy het hulle toe buitentoe gevat en gevra: “Menere, wat moet ek doen om verlos te word?”

Hulle het hom geantwoord: “Glo in die Here Jesus, en jy sal verlos word, jy en al die lede van jou huishouding.” Hulle het toe die woord van die Here aan hom en aan al die mense in sy huishouding

verkondig. Al was dit reeds baie laat in die nag, het hy Paulus en Silas se wonde versorg. Hy is toe daar en dan gedoop, en ook al sy mense. Toe bring hy hulle in sy huis in en sit vir hulle 'n ete voor. Hy en sy hele huishouding was baie bly omdat hulle nou in God geglo het.

Toe dit dag word, het die stadsowerhede polisie gestuur met die boodskap: “Laat daardie mense vry!” Die tronkbewaarder het toe die boodskap aan Paulus oorgedra en gesê: “Die landdroste het laat weet dat julle losgelaat moet word. Julle kan dan nou vertrek; gaan in vrede.”

Maar Paulus het geantwoord: “Ons is sonder dat ons skuldig bevind is, in die openbaar geslaan en in die tronk gestop – en dít terwyl ons Romeinse burgers is. En nou wil hulle ons sommerso stillettjies ontslaan. Volstrek nie! Laat hulle ons self kom uitlei!”

Die polisie het hierdie boodskap vir die stadsowerhede vertel, en hulle het groot geskrik toe hulle hoor Paulus en Silas is Romeinse burgers. Hulle het hulle om verskoning gevra, hulle uit die tronk gelei en hulle gevra om die stad te verlaat. Paulus en Silas is toe terug na Lidia se huis, en hulle het die gelowiges gesien en hulle bemoedig. Daarna het hulle vertrek.

As die Goeie Nuus oor Jesus werklik die antwoord was op die mensdom se grootste vrae, het sommige mense nie die regte vrae gevra nie. Om elke hoek en draai was daar teenstand. Paulus se wetlike troefkaart, sy Romeinse burgerskap, het werklik gehelp in sommige van die situasies. Maar daar was steeds skares om te trotseer (of te vermy), woede om te hanteer en boetes om te betaal wanneer rusverstoring die enigste gerieflike misdaad was wat om Paulus se nek gehang kon word. Niks hiervan was maklik nie, maar Paulus het moeilikheid as 'n geleentheid beskou om God te vertrou en het nooit teruggekyk nie.

Paulus en Silas het deur Amfipolis en Apollonië gereis en in Tessalonika aangekom, waar daar 'n sinagoge van die Jode was.

Soos dit Paulus se gewoonte was, het hy na die sinagogediens gegaan en op drie Sabbatdae na mekaar uit die Skrifte met die Jode geredeneer. Hy het die Skrif verklaar en aangetoon dat die Christus moes ly en uit die dood opstaan. “Hierdie Jesus wat ek aan julle verkondig,” het hy gesê, “Hy is die Messias.” Party van hulle het toe oortuig geraak en by Paulus en Silas aangesluit. 'n Groot aantal Grieke wat die ware God aanbid het, en 'n klomp vooraanstaande vroue het ook nog bygekom.

Die Jode was egter jaloers hieroor. Hulle het toe met die hulp van 'n paar nikswerd leeglêers 'n betoging begin en die stad in oproer gebring. Hulle het na Jason se huis opgeruk en wou Paulus en Silas voor die volk bring. Toe die Jode hulle nie kry nie, sleep hulle vir Jason en 'n paar ander gelowiges na die stadsowerhede en skreeu: “Dit is die mense wat die hele wêreld in beroering bring. En nou is hulle hier in ons stad. Jason het hulle as gaste ontvang. Hulle is almal skuldig aan verraad teen die keiser, want hulle erken 'n ander koning, naamlik Jesus!”

Die skare en die stadsowerhede was ontsteld toe hulle dit hoor. Hulle het hulle egter laat gaan nadat hulle van Jason en die ander gelowiges voldoende borg gekry het.

Toe dit donker was, het die gelowiges vir Paulus en Silas na Berea toe gestuur. Daar aangekom, het hulle na die Jode se sinagoge gegaan.

In Berea het Paulus 'n ywerige en ontvanklike gehoor gekry, alhoewel Joodse teenstanders weer die skare teen Paulus opgestook het. Daarna het hy na Atene gereis waar hy 'n nie-so-ontvanklike skare gekonfronteer het – die filosowe van sy dag. Nadat hy 'n altaar gesien het vir die “onbekende god” het Paulus die gehoor uitgedaag om die lewende God en Skepper, wat so welsprekend deur die lewe van die opgestane Messias gepraat het, te oorweeg. 'n Paar mense het beleef geknik, ander het gelag en 'n klompie het in Jesus geglo. Paulus se sending was om in elke stad sleutelpersone te vind wat die gemeenskap van nuwe gelowiges, 'n “kerk”, te lei, en die behoeftiges te help deur hulle dade van genade en liefde. Hy het na Korinte gegaan en gou het 'n nuwe Christen-gemeenskap ontstaan.

Paulus het Atene verlaat en Korinte toe gegaan. Daar het hy Akwila ontmoet, 'n Jood wat in Pontus gebore is. Hy het kort tevore saam met sy vrou, Priscilla, uit Italië daar aangekom. Hulle is uit Italië weg omdat keiser Claudius beveel het dat alle Jode Rome moes verlaat. Paulus het hulle gaan opsoek. Hy het by hulle ingetrek en saam met hulle gewerk, want hulle was tentmakers net soos hy.

Elke Sabbatdag het hy in die sinagoge met die mense geredeneer en sowel Jode as Grieke probeer oortuig.

Nadat Silas en Timoteus van Masedonië af aangekom het, het Paulus al sy aandag bestee aan die prediking om die Jode daarvan te oortuig dat Jesus die Messias is.

Toe hierdie Jode hom egter aanhou teenstaan en beledig, het hy die stof van sy klere afgeskud en vir hulle gesê: “Julle bloed is op julle eie

kop. Ek is onskuldig. Van nou af spits ek my toe op die nie-Jode.”

Hy is toe daar uit, en het na die huis reg langs die sinagoge gegaan. Dit het behoort aan Titius Justus, 'n nie-Jood wat die ware God aanbid het. Krispus, die hoof van die sinagoge, en sy hele huishouding het tot geloof in die Here gekom. Ook baie Korintiërs het in reaksie op die boodskap gelowig geword en is gedoop.

Een nag het die Here deur 'n visioen vir Paulus gesê: “Moenie bang wees nie; hou aan met preek en moenie begin stilbly nie, want Ék is by jou. Niemand sal 'n hand op jou lê om iets slegs aan jou te doen nie, want in hierdie stad behoort baie mense aan My.” Paulus het die stad vir 'n jaar en ses maande lank sy basis gemaak en die mense onderrig in die woord van God.

Soos die tradisionele manier van kommunikasie was, het Paulus briewe geskryf aan die kerke wat hy gestig het. Hierdie “briewe” is vandag deel van die Bybel se Nuwe Testament. Christene lees dit steeds as geïnspireerde en betroubare woorde oor hoe om God te ken en vir Hom te leef.

Terwyl hy in Korinte was, het Paulus aan die gelowiges in Tessalonika geskryf, ongeveer 51 n.C. Tessalonika was 'n besige hawestad met 200 000 mense (die grootste bevolking in Masedonië). Met baie emosie het Paulus die gelowiges se reaksie teenoor hom en die evangeliebodskap gedurende sy onlangse besoek in herinnering geroep, sy behoefte om hulle weer te sien en die bemoediging wat hy ervaar het toe hy 'n baie gunstige verslag oor hulle van Timoteus ontvang het. Paulus het hulle te midde van hulle swaarkry en vervolging bemoedig, en verduidelik dat die lewende Messias eendag sou terugkom.

Hierdie brief kom van Paulus, Silvanus en Timoteus.

Ons skryf aan die gemeente in Tessalonika wat aan God die Vader en die Here Jesus Christus behoort.

Genade en vrede vir julle.

Wanneer ons bid, dank ons God altyd vir almal van julle. Ons onthou voortdurend hoe julle geloof dae word, hoe hard julle liefde julle laat werk en hoe julle aanhou hoop op ons Here Jesus Christus. In ons gebede noem ons hierdie dinge voor God ons Vader.

God het julle lief, broers en susters. Ons weet dat Hy julle uitgekies

het, want die Goeie Nuus wat ons gebring het, het tot julle gekom, nie net met woorde nie, maar ook deur die krag van die Heilige Gees en met groot oortuiging. Julle weet mos hoe voorbeeldig ons optrede by julle was, en dít ter wille van julle. Julle het mense geword wat ons voorbeeld – en ook die Here s'n – volg, toe julle onder baie moeilike omstandighede die woord aangeneem het met 'n blydschap wat van die Heilige Gees kom. Hierdeur het julle op julle beurt 'n voorbeeld vir al die gelowiges in Masedonië en Agaje geword, want van julle af het die Here se boodskap nie net in Masedonië en Agaje weerklink nie, nee, óral het julle geloof in God bekend geword! Die gevolg is dat óns eintlik niks hoef te sê nie, want die mense praat self oor hoe positief julle ons ontvang het en hoe julle van die afgode af weggedraai het na God toe om die lewende en ware God te dien, en om sy Seun uit die hemel te verwag. Hierdie Seun is Jesus wat God uit die dood opgewek het. Dit is Hý wat ons verlos van die oordeel wat kom.

Julle weet self, broers en susters, dat ons besoek aan julle nie tevergeefs was nie. Ondanks die mishandeling en beledigings wat ons, soos julle weet, vroeër in Filippi moes verduur, het ons vertroue op ons God ons moed gegee om te midde van sterk teenkanting sy Goeie Nuus aan julle te verkondig. Ons prediking destyds het immers nie uit misleiding, onsuiver motiewe of bedrog voortgevloei nie.

Nee, ons praat omdat God ons gekeur het. Hy het die Goeie Nuus aan ons toevertrou. Ons doel is nie om mense tevrede te stel nie, maar God. Hy ondersoek die motiewe van ons harte. Julle weet dat ons nie destyds besig was met 'n geveleiry of 'n skelm geldmakery nie. God is ons getuie! Ons het ook nie by mense eer gesoek nie; nie by julle nie en ook nie by ander mense nie. Al kon ons as apostels van Christus allerhande eise aan julle gestel het, was ons soos babatjies teenoor julle.

Of soos 'n ma wat haar eie kinders aan haar laat drink, só het ons oor julle gevoel. Ons was heeltemal bereid om nie net God se Goeie Nuus met julle te deel nie, maar ook ons eie lewe, want ons het julle liefgekry.

Broers en susters, nadat ons 'n kort rukkie van julle geskei was – wel uit die oog, maar nie uit die hart nie – het ons hard probeer om julle persoonlik weer te sien omdat ons baie na julle verlang. Ons wóú dus na julle toe kom – ek, Paulus, meer as een keer – maar Satan het ons gekeer. Immers, as ons met Jesus ons Here se terugkeer voor Hom moet staan, wie sal ons vooruitsig of blydschap of erekrans wees, as dit nie julle is nie? Júlle is mos ons eer en ons blydschap!

Daarom, toe ons dit nie langer kon uithou nie, het ons besluit om alleen in Atene agter te bly en Timoteus na julle toe te stuur. Hy is ons broer en werk saam met ons vir God deur die Goeie Nuus oor Christus te verkondig. Ons het hom gestuur om julle in die geloof te versterk en aan te spoor sodat niemand onder dié vervolging sou begin wankel nie. Julle weet self dat ons vir vervolging bestem is. Ook toe ons nog by julle was, het ons vooraf vir julle gesê dat ons op die punt staan om vervolgt te word. En, soos julle weet, het dit toe ook gebeur. Daarom, toe ek ook nie langer kon uithou nie, het ek Timoteus gestuur om oor julle geloof uit te vind of die verleier julle nie op 'n manier verlei het en ons harde werk op niks uitgeloopt het nie.

Maar nou het Timoteus van julle af by ons teruggekom met goeie nuus oor julle geloof en liefde. Hy het ook vertel dat julle altyd goeie herinneringe aan ons het en dat julle net so baie na ons verlang as ons na julle. Daarom, broers en susters, deur julle geloof is ons in al ons nood en swaarkry oor julle gerusgestel. Want toe dit blyk dat julle sterk staan in julle verhouding met die Here, het ons weer begin lééf! Hoe kan ons God ooit genoeg vir julle dank? Wat kan ons vir Hom terugdoen vir al die vreugde oor julle waarmee ons voor ons God bly is? Dag en nag vra ons ernstig om julle weer persoonlik te sien en om die tekorte van julle geloof aan te vul.

Mag God ons Vader en Jesus ons Here self ons pad na julle toe oopmaak. En mag die Here julle liefde vir mekaar en vir alle mense so groot en oorvloedig maak dat dit net soos ons liefde vir julle sal wees. Mag Hy julle geestelike lewe so sterk maak dat julle volkome in julle toewyding voor ons God en Vader sal staan wanneer ons Here Jesus kom saam met almal wat aan Hom behoort.

Wat eerste gaan gebeur, is dat die Here self uit die hemel sal neerdaal en dat die dooies wat aan Christus behoort, sal opstaan. Dit sal gebeur wanneer die hoofengel 'n bevel gee en God se trompet weerklink. Daarna sal ons wat bly lewe het, saam met hulle op wolke die lug in weggevoer word om die Here te ontmoet en vir altyd by Hom te wees. Troos mekaar dan met hierdie woorde.

Wees altyd vol blydschap. Moenie ophou bid nie. Wees in alle omstandighede dankbaar, want dit is wat God van julle verwag omdat julle met Christus Jesus verenig is.

Moenie die Gees uitblus nie. Moenie profesieë geringskat nie, maar ondersoek alles wat gesê word en behou wat goed is. Bly weg van elke vorm van kwaad.

Mag die God van vrede julle volkome aan Hom toewy. Ja, mag God julle so bewaar dat julle na gees, siel en liggaam volkome vlekkeloos sal wees wanneer ons Here Jesus Christus terugkom. Hy wat julle roep, is getrou. Hy sál dit doen!

Broers en susters, bid ook vir ons. Groet al die broers en susters met die soen van Christelike liefde. Ek vra namens die Here dat dié brief aan al die broers en susters voorgelees sal word.

Mag die genade van ons Here Jesus Christus met julle wees.

As daar al ooit 'n plek was wat vyandig was teenoor Jesus se heiligheid, geloof en vreugde was dit die stad Korinte. Paganisme het hierdie kosmopolitaanse stad met sy wilde naglewe en hoëklas-markte besit. Tog was Paulus se boodskap standvastig en seker: wanneer jy al die menslike wysheid wat deur die slimste mense in Griekeland versamel is, ondersoek het, is daar steeds probleme wat slegs deur Jesus beantwoord kan word. Paulus se redenaarstalent tesame met sy geweldige kennis van Romeinse en godsdienstige wette het hom gehelp om verby die kleinlike aantygings van die Joodse leiers te beweeg. Of hy in die sinagoge of openbare plein gestaan het, Paulus het gepraat waarvan hy weet: Jesus wat gesterf en opgestaan het, is die sleutel tot vrede met God; net Hy kan die God-vormige leemte in elke hart vul.

Toe Gallio egter goewerneur van Agaje geword het, het sommige Jode 'n verenigde front teen Paulus gevorm en hom voor die hof gedaag. Hulle het Paulus daarvan aangekla dat hy die mense “probeer oorhaal om God op maniere te vereer wat teen die wet is”.

Net toe Paulus homself wou begin verdedig, sê Gallio vir die Jode: “As dit oor 'n onreg of 'n ernstige misdaad gegaan het, Jode, sou ek julle klag aangehoor het. Maar aangesien dit 'n twis is oor 'n boodskap en name en oor julle eie wet, moet julle self daaraan aandag gee. In sulke sake wil ek nie regter wees nie.”

Hy het die hof toe verdaag. Die klaers het toe almal vir Sostenes, die hoof van die sinagoge, gegryp en hom net daar voor die regbank aangerand. Gallio het hom egter aan niks hiervan gesteur nie.

Paulus het nog etlike dae in Korinte gebly, en toe van die gelowiges afskeid geneem. Hy het Sirië toe weggevaar, en Priscilla en Akwila is saam met hom. (In Kengreë het hy sy hare laat skeer omdat hy 'n gelofte gedoen het.) By hulle aankoms in Efese het Paulus sy reisgenote by die hawe gelos en self die sinagoge besoek. Daar het hy met die Jode geredeneer. Hulle het hom gevra om langer te bly, maar

hy wou nie. Toe hy vertrek, het hy gesê: “Ek kom na julle toe terug, as God wil.” Hy het toe van Efese af weggevaar en in Sesarea aan land gegaan. Daarvandaan het hy opgegaan en die gemeente in Jerusalem gaan groet, en toe Antiogië toe vertrek.

Na hy ’n tyd lank in Antiogië gebly het, het hy weer vertrek. Hy het deur die landstreke Galasië en Frigië gereis, en oral die gelowiges geestelik versterk.

Intussen het Apollos, ’n Jood wat in Aleksandrië gebore is, in Efese aangekom. Hy was ’n begaafde spreker en goed met skrifuitleg. Hy het in “Die Pad van die Here” onderrig ontvang en het met brandende geesdrif gepraat en ander noukeurig geleer van Jesus. Hy het egter net die doop van Johannes geken. Hy het self met vrymoedigheid in die sinagoge begin preek. Toe Priscilla en Akwila hom hoor, het hulle hom eenkant gevat en vir hom “Die Pad van God” nog duideliker uiteengesit.

Toe Apollos na Agaje toe wou gaan, het die gelowiges hom aangemoedig. Hulle het vir die gelowiges in Agaje geskryf dat hulle hom moet ontvang. Daar aangekom, het hy baie beteken vir dié wat deur die genade van God gelowig geword het, want hy het die Jode in die openbaar kragtig weerlê en met die Skrif bewys dat Jesus die Messias is.

Oral waarheen Paulus gereis het, het hy God se krag aan die werk gesien in mense se lewens. In sommige plekke het hy geestelike deurbrake gesien waar baie mense geglo het; in ander plekke is hy weggejaag en geslaan. Hy het vertrou dat God die goeie in al hierdie dinge sou bewerk. Alhoewel Paulus ’n onvermoeide, reisende sendeling was, het hy vir uitgerekte tydperke in sekere strategiese stede gebly om sendingwerk te doen. Dit was die geval met Antiogië en Korinte. En nou was die apostel op die punt om meer as twee jaar te bly in Efese – die voorste kommersiële sentrum van Klein-Asië en die bewaker van die tempel van Artemis (die Griekse naam vir die Romeinse godin Diana), wat een van die sewe wonders van die antieke wêreld was.

Terwyl Apollos in Korinte was, het Paulus deur die binnelandse gebiede van Klein-Asië Efese toe gereis.

Paulus is toe na die sinagoge en hy het daar vir drie maande lank met vrymoedigheid gepreek. Hy het besprekings gehou en oortuigende argumente aangevoer oor die koningsheerskappy van God. Party was egter koppig en wou hulle nie laat oortuig nie. Hulle het ook voor die

gemeente sleg gepraat van “Die Pad”. Toe het Paulus die sinagoge verlaat en hy het die gelowiges saam met hom gevat. Hy het daaglik in die lesingsaal van Tirannus besprekings gehou.

So het dit vir die volgende twee jaar gegaan sodat almal in die Romeinse provinsie Asië, Jode sowel as Grieke, die boodskap van die Here gehoor het.

God het deur Paulus se optrede wonderbaarlike dinge gedoen. Selfs wanneer doeke of voorskote wat aan sy vel geraak het, op siekes gesit is, het hulle siektes verdwyn. Selfs bese teeste het uit mense uitgegaan.

Party rondreisende Joodse geesuitdrywers het ook probeer om die Naam van die Here Jesus te gebruik vir mense wat bese teeste gehad het. Die formule wat hulle probeer het, was: “Ek dryf julle uit in die Naam van dié Jesus vir wie Paulus verkondig!” Hierdie geesuitdrywers was die sewe seuns van ’n senior Joodse priester, Skeva. Maar die bese tees het vir hulle gesê: “Jesus ken ek, en van Paulus weet ek, maar wie’s julle?” Die man in wie die bese tees was, spring toe onder hulle in. Hy was te sterk vir hulle en kry die oorhand oor hulle sodat hulle kaal en erg beseer uit daardie huis gevlug het.

Dié gebeure het bekend geword by al die Jode en Grieke in Efese. ’n Gevoel van diep ontsag het oor hulle almal gekom, en die Naam van die Here Jesus is grootgemaak. Baie van dié wat gelowig geword het, het hulle aangemeld en al hulle praktyke openlik bely. Heelparty van dié wat toorkunste beoefen het, het hulle toorboeke saamgebring en voor almal verbrand. Die waarde van dié boeke was 50 000 silwermuntstukke. So het die woord van die Here kragtig gegroei en sterk geword.

Juis in daardie tyd was daar ’n taamlke groot opskudding oor “Die Pad”. Dit het begin by ’n silwersmid met die naam Demetrius. Hy het silwer Artemistempeltjies gemaak en vir ambagsmanne ’n beduidende verdienste verskaf. Hy roep toe die ambagsmanne en ander wat soortgelyke werk doen, en sê vir hulle: “Manne, julle weet dat ons voorspoed uit dié bedryf kom. En nou sien en hoor julle dat hierdie Paulus ’n beduidende klomp mense van sy standpunt oortuig het, naamlik dat gode wat met die hand gemaak word, glad nie gode is nie. En dit gebeur nie net in Efese nie, maar in byna die hele provinsie Asië! Dis nie net ’n geval van ons bedryf wat gevaar loop om sy goeie naam te verloor nie. Die gevaar bestaan ook dat die tempel van die groot godin Artemis, wat die hele Asië én die wêreld as god vereer, as nikswerd beskou word en dat sy van haar grootheid beroof gaan

word!”

By die aanhoor hiervan het hulle woede oorgekook en hulle het begin skreeu: “Groot is Artemis van die Efesiërs!” Die hele stad was in rep en roer, en soos een man het die mense amfiteater toe gestorm. Hulle het vir Gaius en Aristargus, albei Masedoniese reisgenote van Paulus, saamgesleep. Paulus wou saam met die betogers ingaan, maar die gelowiges wou hom nie toelaat nie. Ook het party van die hoë amptenare van die provinsie Asië wat Paulus se vriende was, vir hom ’n boodskap gestuur en hom gewaarsku om dit nie in die amfiteater te waag nie.

Binne die amfiteater het party dít geskreeu en ander dát. Die vergadering was regtig in die war en die meeste het eintlik nie eers geweet hoekom hulle daar bymekaar was nie.

Sommige van die Jode het vir Aleksander vorentoe gestoot, en hulle het uit die skare vir hom gesê wat hy moet doen. Hy het met sy hand beduie dat hy iets ter verdediging vir almal wil sê. Maar toe hulle agterkom dat hy ’n Jood is, was daar vir byna twee uur lank één kreet van die kant van die skreeuende skare: “Groot is Artemis van die Efesiërs! Groot is Artemis van die Efesiërs!”

Uiteindelik het die stadsklerk die betogers tot bedaring gebring. “Geagte Efesiërs,” het hy gesê, “daar is verseker geen mens wat nie weet dat die stad Efese die tempelbeskermer is van die groot Artemis, wie se beeld hier by ons uit die hemel geval het nie! Dít staan soos ’n paal bo water. Bedaar dus en moenie iets oorhaastigs doen nie.

“Julle het hierdie mans hierheen gebring, alhoewel hulle nie iets uit ons tempel gesteel of ons godin beledig het nie. As Demetrius en sy ambagsmanne dus ’n klag teen iemand het – hofsittings word gehou en daar is goewerneurs. Laat hulle mekaar daar gaan aankla. En as julle verdere klagtes het, moet die saak op ’n wettige volksvergadering ter tafel gebring word. Ons loop eerlikwaar gevaar om oor vandag se gebeure van opstand aangekla te word. Daar is geen gronde vir hierdie betoging nie, en ons kan dit nie verantwoord nie.”

Hiermee het hy die vergadering verdaag.

Met die betoging verby, het Paulus die gelowiges bymekaargeroep en hulle moed ingespraat. Daarna het hy hulle gegroet en Masedonië toe vertrek.

Naby die einde van Paulus se tweejaar-verblyf in Efese, het hy ’n baie op-die-man-af brief vir die Christene in Korinte geskryf. Alhoewel hierdie nie sy eerste brief aan hulle was nie, ken ons dit as 1 Korintiërs omdat dit die eerste van twee briewe van Paulus aan die

Korinte is wat in die Nuwe Testament voorkom. In Korinte moes Jesus se volgelinge hard werk om hulle geloof te behou. Afgodsaanbidding was baie gewild aangesien Korinte die tuiste van ten minste 'n dosyn heidense tempels was. Op 'n stadium was daar meer as 1 000 tempelprostitute net by Afrodite se tempel. Om die waarheid uit te leef, was nie maklik nie. En ongelukkig was die gelowiges in Korinte verdeel in verskeie faksies in plaas daarvan om die uitdagings van hulle kultuur as 'n verenigde front te trotseer. Paulus se brief het welsprekend gepraat oor die sake wat hulle moes trotseer, en geëindig met 'n herinnering dat Jesus die dood oorwin het.

Hierdie brief kom van Paulus. Deur die wil van God is ek geroep om 'n apostel van Christus Jesus te wees. Ons broer Sostenes skryf hierdie brief saam met my.

Ons skryf aan die gemeente van God in Korinte, julle vir wie God deur Christus Jesus vir Homself afgesonder en geroep het om sy eie mense te wees. En verder skryf ons ook aan almal, waar hulle ook al mag wees, wat Jesus Christus ons Here aanbid.

Mag die genade en vrede van God ons Vader en die Here Jesus Christus met julle wees.

En nou, broers en susters, pleit ek by julle in die Naam van ons Here Jesus Christus om eendragtig saam te staan – één in julle oortuigings. Daar mag nie groepvorming onder julle wees nie. Julle moet van harte saamstem in julle denke en in julle visie. Lede van die huisgesin van Chloë het aan my vertel, my broers en susters, dat daar allerlei struwelinge onder julle voorkom. Ek bedoel dat party van julle sê: Ek volg Paulus; ander weer: Ek volg Apollos; nog ander: Ek volg Petrus¹; en nog ander: Ek volg Christus.

Dink julle regtig Christus kan so in stukkies verdeel word? Paulus is tog beslis nie vir julle gekruisig nie! Of is julle dalk in Paulus se naam gedoop?

Broers en susters, toe ek by julle was, kon ek nie met julle praat soos met geestelike volwassenes nie. Ek moes met julle praat soos met mense wat nog wêrelds is, soos met kindertjies in die Christelike geloof. Ek moes julle met melk voed, nie met vaste kos nie, want julle sou nie iets sterkers kon verteer nie. Trouens, julle is ook nou nog nie gereed daarvoor nie, want julle word nog steeds deur wêreldse

neigings beheer. Julle is jaloers op mekaar en maak rusie. Is dit nie 'n bewys dat julle nog deur wêreldse neigings oorheers word nie? Julle tree op soos mense wat nie aan die Here behoort nie. As die een sê: "Ek volg Paulus," en die ander een sê: "Ek verkies Apollos," tree julle dan nie op soos mense wat nie aan die Here behoort nie?

Wie is Apollos of Paulus nou eintlik dat julle so oor ons verdeel is? Ons is tog net diensknegte deur wie julle tot die geloof gekom het. Elkeen van ons het maar net die werk gedoen wat die Here aan ons toevertrou het. My werk was om die saad te plant. Apollos moes dit natgooi. Maar God het laat groei. Wie plant en wie natgooi, is nie belangrik nie. Die belangrike Een is God, want dit is Hý wat laat groei. Die een wat plant en die een wat natgooi, werk saam en het een gesamentlike doel, alhoewel elkeen sy eie beloning sal ontvang in ooreenstemming met sy eie harde werk. Ons is Gód se werkspan. Julle is Gód se saailand, Gód se gebou, nie ons s'n nie.

Op grond van die genade wat God aan my bewys het, het ek soos 'n meesterbouwer die fondament gelê. Ander bou daarop voort. Maar elkeen wat op hierdie fondament bou, moet baie versigtig wees. Want niemand kan 'n ander fondament lê as die een wat alreeds gelê is nie – Jesus Christus.

Moet julle dus nie daarop beroem dat julle volgelinge van een spesifieke leier is nie. Alles is immers julle s'n: Paulus en Apollos en Petrus, die wêreld, die lewe en die dood, die hede en die toekoms. Alles behoort aan julle! Maar julle behoort weer aan Christus, en Christus aan God.

In my vorige brief het ek vir julle geskryf dat julle nie met mense moet assosieer wat 'n onsedelike lewe lei nie. Daarmee het ek hoegenaamd nie die ongelowiges van die wêreld bedoel wat 'n onsedelike lewe lei of gierigaards of swendelaars of afgodsdienaars is nie. Om dit reg te kry sou julle hierdie wêreld moes verlaat! Wat ek bedoel het, is wat ek nou in hierdie brief bevestig: Julle moenie in die gemeente assosieer met iemand wat op Christenskap aanspraak maak en ten spyte daarvan 'n onsedelike lewe lei of 'n gierigaard of afgodsdienaar of kwaadsteker of dronkaard of swendelaar is nie. Julle moenie eers saam met so iemand eet nie.

Dis nie my taak om oor die buitelanders te oordeel nie. Maar dit is tog sekerlik julle verantwoordelikheid om te oordeel oor dié binne die gemeente wat hulle op hierdie manier skuldig maak. Gód sal sy oordeel vel oor hulle wat buite staan.

Flug dus weg van seksuele losbandigheid. Geen ander sonde beïnvloed 'n mens se liggaam so direk soos hierdie een nie. Want as jy seksuele losbandigheid bedryf, sondig jy teen jou eie liggaam. Of verstaan julle nie dat julle liggame 'n tempel van die Heilige Gees is wat in julle woon en deur God aan julle gegee is nie? Julle behoort nie aan julleself nie, want julle is teen 'n duur prys gekoop. Daarom moet julle God met julle liggaam verheerlik.

Daarom, my geliefdes, vlug weg van die afgodsdienste. Ek weet ek praat met verstandige mense. Oordeel self oor wat ek nou gaan sê. Wanneer ons aan die tafel van die Here die seën oor die beker uitspreek, kry ons mos aandeel aan Christus se bloed. En as ons die brood breek, kry ons mos aandeel aan Christus se liggaam. Omdat ons almal aandeel aan een en dieselfde brood kry, maak ons almal saam, al is ons baie mense, een liggaam uit. En dink aan die volk Israel. Almal wat van die offers eet, word daardeur tot 'n eenheid verenig.

Wat probeer ek sê? Bedoel ek dat afgodsoffers iets belangriks is of dat die afgode werklik bestaan? Hoegenaamd nie. Wat ek egter wel sê, is dat daardie offers in werklikheid aan duiwels gebring word en nie aan 'n godheid nie. En ek wil nie hê enigeen van julle moet met die duiwels gemeenskap hê nie. Julle kan tog nie die beker van die Here drink en ook nog die beker van die duiwels nie! Julle kan nie aan die tafel van die Here deel hê en ook nog aan die tafel van die duiwels nie!

En nou, broers en susters, kom ek by julle volgende navraag, naamlik oor die gawes van die Gees. Ek wil hê julle moet hieroor goed ingelig wees sodat julle julle gawes reg sal gebruik.

Daar is 'n hele verskeidenheid geestelike gawes, en tog kom hulle van dieselfde Gees. En daar is 'n hele verskeidenheid bedienings, maar ons dien dieselfde Here. Daar is talle aktiwiteite in die gemeente, maar dit is dieselfde God wat al hierdie dinge kragtig in ons almal aktiveer.

Die menslike liggaam het baie ledemate, maar hierdie baie ledemate vorm almal saam net een liggaam. So is dit ook met Christus se liggaam. Party van ons is Jode, ander Grieke, ander weer slawe en nog ander vry mense. Maar ons is almal gedoop sodat ons nou die een liggaam van Christus is. En ons is almal van die een Gees deurdrenk. Ja, die liggaam bestaan nie net uit een ledemaat nie, maar uit baie.

As die voet sou sê: “Omdat ek nie die hand is nie, is ek nie deel van die liggaam nie,” maak dit hom tog nie minder deel van die liggaam nie. En as die oor sou sê: “Omdat ek maar net ’n oor is en nie ’n oog nie, is ek nie deel van die liggaam nie,” maak dit hom tog geensins minder deel van die liggaam nie. Veronderstel ’n mens se hele liggaam sou uit ’n oog bestaan – hoe sal jy dan hoor? Of as jou hele liggaam net een groot oor sou wees – hoe sou jy enigiets kon ruik?

Maar nou het God dit so beskik dat daar verskillende ledemate sal wees en dat elkeen van hulle sy eie plek in die liggaam sal hê, soos Hy dit goedvind.

Julle is Christus se liggaam en elkeen van julle is ’n noodsaaklike liggaamsdeel.

Al sou ek enige taal op aarde of selfs in die hemel kon praat, maar ek kom die liefde kort, het ek ’n galmende trom of ’n klinkende simbaal geword. En al sou ek die gawe van profesie hê, en sou ek alle geheime kon ontrafel, en al die kennis ter wêreld hê, en al sou ek genoeg geloof hê om berge te verskuif, maar ek kom die liefde kort, sou ek ’n ronde nul wees. En al sou ek al my besittings vir die armes gee en selfs my liggaam opoffer sodat ek my daarop kon beroem, maar ek kom die liefde kort, sou dit my niks help nie.

Die liefde is geduldig en vriendelik, die liefde is nie jaloers nie, die liefde blaas nie sy eie beuel nie, is nie vol van homself nie. Dit tree nie onwaardig op nie, stel nie sy eie belange voorop nie, is nie kort van draad nie, hou nie boek van die kwaad wat hom aangedoen word nie. Dit treur oor die onreg wat plaasvind, en juig as die waarheid seëvier.

Broers en susters, ek herinner julle aan die Goeie Nuus wat ek tevore reeds aan julle verkondig het. Julle het dit aangeneem en hierdie boodskap vorm die vaste basis van julle geloof. Deur hierdie Goeie Nuus word julle verlossing bewerk, dit wil sê as julle daaraan vashou soos ek dit oorspronklik aan julle verkondig het – anders was julle geloof heeltemal nutteloos.

Die kern van die boodskap wat ek destyds aan julle deurgegee het, en wat ek weer van hulle voor my ontvang het, was dat Christus, soos in die Skrif staan, vir ons sonde gesterf het. Ook dat Hy begrawe is en God Hom op die derde dag opgewek het, soos in die Skrif staan. Verder dat Hy aan Petrus verskyn het en daarna ook aan die twaalf apostels. Daarna het Hy aan meer as 500 van sy volgelinge tegelyk verskyn. Van hulle leef die meeste nou nog, maar party is reeds dood.

Daarna het Hy aan Jakobus verskyn en later aan al die apostels. Heel laaste van almal het Hy ook aan my verskyn, asof ek ontydig gebore is.

Ek is werklikwaar die geringste van al die apostels, een wat die naam van 'n apostel nie werd is nie omdat ek God se kerk vervolg het.

Maar deur God se genade is ek wat ek vandag is. Hy het sy goedheid nie tevergeefs aan my bewys nie. Ek het harder gewerk as al die ander – en tog was dit ook weer nie ek nie, maar God se goedheid wat my gedra het. Maak ook nie saak wie gepreek het nie. Die belangrike feit is dat dít die Goeie Nuus is wat ons verkondig en wat julle in die geloof aangeneem het.

Sê vir my, as ons verkondig dat God Christus uit die dood laat opstaan het, hoe is daar dan sommige van julle wat beweer dat daar nie so iets soos die opstanding uit die dood bestaan nie? As daar werklik geen opstanding uit die dood is nie, dan is Christus ook nie opgewek nie.

Maar as Christus nie opgewek is nie, sou dit beteken dat ons verkondiging geen substansie het nie en dat julle geloof ook platval. Dan sou ons as leuenaars omtrent God aan die kaak gestel word. Dan het ons mos teen die waarheid van God in getuig dat Hy Christus opgewek het, terwyl Hy dit in werklikheid nie gedoen het nie – dit wil nou sê, as die dooies nie opgewek word nie.

Ek sê weer, as die dooies nie opgewek word nie, dan is Christus ook nie opgewek nie. En as Christus nie opgewek is nie, dan is julle geloof waardeloos en is julle nog vasgevang in julle sondes. In daardie geval is ook dié wat in Christus gesterf het, verlore! As ons egter op niks meer sou kon hoop as dat Christus 'n verskil sal maak aan ons huidige lewe nie, sou ons definitief die bejammerenswaardigste mense onder die son wees!

Maar nou is die werklikheid totaal anders! God hét Christus uit die dood laat opstaan! Dit gee ons die waarborg dat ook die ander dooies sal opstaan.

Julle sien, soos die dood deur 'n mens, naamlik Adam, in die wêreld ingekom het, so het die opstanding uit die dood ook deur 'n mens werklikheid geword. Almal van ons sterf omdat ons almal aan Adam, die eerste mens, verbonde is. Net so sal almal wat aan Christus, die ander mens, verbonde is, weer lewendig gemaak word. Maar daar is 'n bepaalde volgorde hieraan verbonde: Christus was die eerste Een; daarna, wanneer Christus terugkom, sal al sy mense opgewek word. Vervolgens sal die einde kom wanneer Jesus die koningsheerskappy

aan God die Vader sal teruggee nadat Hy elke vyandige mag wat daar kan wees, onderwerp het. Want Christus moet aan bewind bly totdat Hy alle vyande finaal verslaan en aan Hom onderdanig gemaak het.

Ek wil aan julle 'n diep waarheid vertel wat God aan ons bekendgemaak het. Dit is dat ons nie almal sal sterf nie, maar ons almal sal verander word. Dit sal dadelik, ja, in 'n oogwink gebeur, wanneer die laaste trompet weerklink. Want as die trompet sy klank laat hoor, sal die dooies met onverganklike liggame opgewek word. En dan sal ons ook verander word. Want ons verganklike aardse liggame moet in hemelse liggame omskep word wat nooit sal sterf nie.

Wanneer dit gebeur – wanneer ons verganklike aardse liggame in hemelse liggame omskep word wat nooit sal sterf nie – dan uiteindelik sal die Skrifwoord waar word: “Die dood is totaal uitgewis, want dit is heeltemal oorwin.”

“O dood, waar is jou oorwinning?

Dood, wat het van jou angel geword?”

Want sonde is die angel wat die dood veroorsaak. En dit is die wet wat aan die sonde sy slaankrag gee. Aan God kom ons dank toe – Hy wat aan ons die oorwinning oor die sonde en die dood gee deur Jesus Christus ons Here!

Dus, my geliefde broers en susters, staan baie vas, onbeweeglik. Gee altyd julle allerbeste vir die Here se werk, want julle weet voor die Here is alles wat julle doen die moeite werd.

Die gemeentes hier in die provinsie Asië groet julle hartlik in die Here, saam met Akwila en Priscilla en al die ander gemeentelede wat in hulle huis bymekaarkom. Al die broers en susters hier het my gevra om julle namens hulle te groet. Groet mekaar met die soen van Christelike liefde.

Hier is my eie groet. ek is paulus, en ek skryf dit met my eie hand.

As iemand die Here nie liefhet nie – laat hom vervloek wees. Kom, ons Here!

Mag die genade van ons Here Jesus met julle wees.

Mag my liefde met julle almal in Christus Jesus bly.

Hoe behaag 'n mens vir God? Baie godsdienste sê 'n mens moet God/ gode bevredig met offers of bygelowige rituele. Tog skaf God se storie al ons godsdienstige doen-lyties af. Geloof in Jesus is God se weg vir

ons, en vreugde in Jesus is wat God van ons vra. Wanneer godsdienstige mense volgeling van Jesus word, word hulle verlos van sonde en wetlike rituele.

Die Christene in Galasië het onder die invloed gekom van Joodse Christene wat geglo het sommige van die seremoniële praktyke uit Judaïsme is verpligtend vir Jesus se volgeling. Paulus het vir die kerke in hierdie gedeelte van Klein-Asië geskryf om hulle te waarsku dat hulle God in werklikheid verlaat en na 'n vals evangelie draai. Hy het kragtig verkondig dat mense nie gered kan word omdat hulle goeie werke in die algemeen doen of spesifiek aan die Wet van Moses gehoorsaam is nie. Ons moet na God toe kom deur op Jesus alleen te vertrou. Slegs dan sal ons vryheid ervaar.

Hierdie brief kom van Paulus, 'n apostel wat nie deur mense aangestel of gestuur is nie, maar deur Jesus Christus en deur God die Vader – Hy wat Jesus Christus uit die dood opgewek het. Dit kom ook van al die broers en susters hier saam met my.

Ons skryf aan die gemeentes in Galasië.

Mag die genade en vrede van God ons Vader en van Jesus Christus met julle wees. Jesus Christus het volgens God ons Vader se wil vir ons sondes gesterf om ons te bevry van die bose tyd waarin ons nou lewe. Hiervoor moet God se heerlikheid vir altyd en altyd geprys word! Amen.

Ek is verstom oor wat julle gedoen het. Hoe kon julle so gou julle rug op God draai? Op Hóm wat julle deur Christus se genade na Hom toe geroep het! Julle het julle ore uitgeleen vir 'n ander “Goeie Nuus”. Maar daar is geen ander Goeie Nuus nie! Al wat daar is, is 'n paar mense wat julle deurmekaarmaak, ja, wat die Goeie Nuus van Christus wil verdraai. Vervloek is elkeen wat 'n ander boodskap verkondig as wat ons aan julle verkondig het, al sou dit ons self of 'n boodskapper uit die hemel wees. Ek herhaal: Vervloek is elkeen wat 'n ander boodskap verkondig as dié een wat julle ontvang het!

O, dwase Galasiërs! Wie het julle getoor? Christus is dan só duidelik vir julle beskryf dat julle Hom as't ware aan die kruis kon sien hang! Ek wil net dit vir julle vra: Het julle die Gees ontvang deur die wet te onderhou of deur te glo wat julle gehoor het? Hoe kan julle so dwaas wees? Wil julle dit wat die Gees in julle begin het, nou uit eie krag probeer klaarmaak? Was al die goeie dinge wat julle beleef het, dan

tevergeefs? Dit kon tog nie tevergeefs gewees het nie! Vra julle dus af: Het God die Gees vir julle gegee en wonders onder julle bewerk omdat julle die wet onderhou of omdat julle geglo het wat julle gehoor het?

Maar elkeen wat op die onderhouding van die wet vertrou om deur God vrygespreek te word, is vervloek. Die Skrif sê mos: “Vervloek is elkeen wat nie alles doen wat in die boek van die wet geskryf staan nie.” Dit is dus duidelik dat niemand deur God vrygespreek word op grond van wetsonderhouding nie. Daar staan geskryf: “Wie deur gelóóf vrygespreek word, sal lewe.”

Voordat die geloof gekom het, is ons deur die wet bewaak. Ons was gevange gehou totdat God se plan van geloof geopenbaar sou word. Die wet het ons soos ’n kinderopvoeder opgepas totdat Christus gekom het. Ons is opgepas sodat ons deur te glo God se vryspraak kon ontvang. Noudat die tyd van geloof gekom het, staan ons egter nie langer onder die toesig van ’n kinderopvoeder nie.

Julle is almal God se kinders deurdat julle in Christus Jesus glo. Almal wat deur die doop met Christus één geword het, se lewe word nou heeltemal deur Christus bepaal. Nou is daar nie langer sprake van Jood of Griek, slaaf of vryman, man of vrou nie; julle is tog almal één in Christus Jesus.

Om vry te wees! – dit is waarvoor Christus ons vrygemaak het! Maak seker dat julle vry bly, en moet nie weer onder ’n slawejuk vasgebind word nie.

Broers en susters, julle is inderdaad geroep om in vryheid te leef. Moet net nie die vryheid misbruik om sondige begeertes te bevredig nie, maar gebruik dit om mekaar met liefde te dien.

Die dinge wat ons sondige geaardheid ons laat doen, is bekend: seksuele sondes, onreinheid, losbandigheid, afgodery, towerkuns, vyandigheid, rusie, jaloesie, woede, selfsugtige ambisie, verdeeldheid, partyskappe, afguns, dronkenskap, wilde partytjies en al sulke dinge. Ek herhaal my vroeëre waarskuwing oor hierdie dinge: Wie sulke dinge doen, sal nie as erfgenaam deel hê aan God se koningsheerskappy nie.

Maar die vrug wat die Gees voortbring, is: liefde, vreugde, vrede, geduld, vriendelikheid, goedheid, getrouheid, sagmoedigheid en selfbeheersing. Teen sulke dinge is daar nie ’n wet nie. Maar dié wat

aan Christus Jesus behoort, het die hartstogte en die begeertes van hulle sondige geaardheid gekruisig. Ons lewe deur die Gees; daarom moet die Gees ook ons leefstyl bepaal. Ons moenie te veel van onself dink, mekaar irriteer of op mekaar jaloers wees nie.

Broers en susters, mag die genade van ons Here Jesus Christus met julle gees wees. Amen.

Paulus het nog nooit die kerk in Rome, wat Jode en nie-Jode ingesluit het, maar hoofsaaklik nie-Jode, besoek nie. Ongeveer 57 n.C. het hy vir hulle 'n wonderlike brief geskryf om hulle verstaan van God se storie van Jesus die Messias te versterk en om hulle moed onder die druk te gee. Hierdie brief het grondbeginsel-waarhede oor Christenskap gegee asook antwoorde oor moeilike vrae soos sonde, genade, die Joodse wet en die oneindige krag van God se liefde.

Hierdie brief kom van Paulus. Ek is 'n dienskneg van Christus Jesus. Hy het my geroep om sy apostel te wees. Ek is afgesonder om God se Goeie Nuus te verkondig. Hierdie Goeie Nuus het Hy reeds lank gelede deur sy profete in die Skrif beloof. Dit gaan oor sy Seun, Jesus Christus. Wat sy menslikheid betref, is Hy uit die nageslag van Dawid gebore. Wat sy heilige Goddelikheid betref – sy opstanding uit die dood het kragdadig bevestig dat Hy die Seun van God is. Wat meer is, Hy is ook ons Here!

Ek skryf aan julle almal in Rome – julle vir wie God liefhet en vir wie Hy geroep het om sý mense te wees. Mag die genade en vrede van God ons Vader en die Here Jesus Christus met julle wees.

Vir hierdie Goeie Nuus is ek allesbehalwe skaam. Dit is immers God se krag wat hier aan die werk is. Dit bring verlossing vir elkeen wat glo – heel eerste vir die Jode, maar ook vir die nie-Jode. Hierdie Goeie Nuus maak bekend dat God ons van ons sondes vryspreek. En dit gebeur enkel en alleen deurdat ons glo. Soos die Skrif sê: “Elkeen wat vrygespreek word omdat hy glo, sal lewe.”

Ons weet dat die wet van toepassing is op almal wat onder die wet is. Daarom kan niemand van ons ons verweer nie en is die hele wêreld skuldig voor God. Niemand sal dus op grond van wetsgehoorsaming voor God vrygespreek kan word nie. Hoe beter ons die wet van God leer ken, hoe duideliker blyk ons sonde.

Maar nou het God vir ons 'n ander weg bekendgemaak waardeur ons sy vryspraak kan verkry – nie deur wetsgehoorsaming nie, maar langs die weg waarvan die Skrif al lankal getuig: God spreek ons vry deur geloof in Christus Jesus en dit geld sonder onderskeid vir almal wat glo. Ons het immers almal gesondig. Ons almal het God beroof van die eer wat Hom toekom. Maar nou spreek God ons in sy genade vry op grond van die verlossing wat Christus Jesus vir ons verkry het – en dit sonder enige verdienste van ons kant. Want God het Hom gestuur as 'n offer wat deur sy sterwe versoening bewerk het vir almal wat glo. Op hierdie manier het Hy duidelik aangetoon wat sy vryspraak behels: Aan die een kant het Hy die sondes vergewe wat vroeër in die tyd van sy verdraagsaamheid begaan is; aan die ander kant het Hy ook duidelik aangetoon wat sy vryspraak nou behels. Op hierdie manier blyk dit dat Hy nie net regverdig is nie, maar terselfdertyd ook elkeen regverdig verklaar wat in Jesus glo.

Kan ons ons dus daarop beroem dat ons enigiets gedoen het om die vryspraak te verdien? Dis heeltemal buite die kwessie, want ons vryspraak berus nie op ons goeie dade nie, maar op ons geloof. Ons is immers daarvan oortuig dat mense vrygespreek word deurdat hulle glo en nie deur wetsgehoorsaming nie.

Abraham is ons aardse voorvader. Hoe pas hy in hierdie prentjie van vryspraak deur die geloof? Was dit op grond van sy goeie werke dat God hom vrygespreek het? As dit inderdaad so was, sou hy dalk goeie rede gehad het om te spog. Maar vanuit God se oogpunt het hy absoluut niks gehad om oor te spog nie. Die Skrif verklaar mos: “Abraham het in God geglo, en God het hom vrygespreek.”

Wanneer mense 'n werk verrig, word hulle loon nie as 'n guns beskou nie, maar as vergoeding. Die saak staan heeltemal anders met daardie mense wat geen prestasie het waarop hulle kan staatmaak nie, maar wat glo in Hom wat die goddeloses vryspreek – hulle word vrygespreek deurdat hulle glo. Koning Dawid het hiervan gepraat toe hy beskryf het hoe gelukkig die mens is wat sonder enige wetsprestasies tog deur God vrygespreek word:

“Gelukkig is daardie mense
wie se oortredings nie gestraf word nie
en wie se sondes uitgewis word.

Gelukkig is die mens
vir wie die HERE die sonde
glad nie meer toereken nie!”

As mense wat deur God vrygespreek is omdat ons glo, het ons nou vrede met God op grond van wat Jesus Christus ons Here gedoen het. Deur Jesus Christus het ons, deurdat ons glo, toegang verkry tot hierdie heerlike posisie van genade waarin ons ons nou bevind, en ons jubel vol verwagting oor die heerlijkheid wat God aan ons gaan gee. Dis egter nie al nie – ons jubel selfs in ons swaarkry, want ons besef dat die swaarkry ons leer om te volhard. Op sy beurt kweek volharding betroubaarheid van karakter; en betroubaarheid van karakter versterk ons toekomsverwagting. En hierdie toekomsverwagting sal ons nie teleurstel nie, want ons weet hoe lief God ons het. Hy het sy liefde mos in ons harte uitgestort deur sy Heilige Gees wat Hy aan ons gegee het.

Ja, juis toe ons nog totaal hulpeloos was, het Christus vir ons, die goddeloses, kom sterf. 'n Persoon sal kwalik bereid wees om vir 'n regverdige mens te sterf. Miskien sal iemand nog kans sien om vir 'n besonder goeie mens te sterf. God laat blyk sý liefde vir ons egter daarin dat Christus vir ons kom sterf het ten spyte daarvan dat ons nog sondaars was.

Ons is nou vrygespreek deur Jesus se dood. Hoeveel te meer sal Hy ons nie, deur Jesus, verlos van die toekomstige oordeel nie! Want as God ons, terwyl ons nog sy vyande was, deur die dood van sy Seun tot sy vriende gemaak het, hoeveel te meer sal Hy ons nie noudat ons sy vriende is, deur Hom, die lewende Jesus, van die oordeel red nie! Bo alles kan ons nou ook jubel in God omdat Jesus Christus ons Here ons bevoorreg het om nou God se vriende te wees.

Want wat die sonde uitbetaal, is die dood. Maar God se genadegeskenk is die ewige lewe wat ons deel word deur Christus Jesus ons Here!

Vir hulle wat aan Christus Jesus verbind is, is die oordeel nou heeltemal weggeneem. Die lewegewende Gees is so magtig dat Hy jou deur Christus Jesus bevry het van die greep van die sonde wat uitloop op die dood. Die wet van Moses kon ons as gevolg van ons sondige natuur nie verlos nie. Daarom het God sy eie Seun met 'n menslike natuur soos ons sondige menslike natuur na ons toe gestuur om as offer vir ons sonde te dien. Daarmee het Hy afgereken met die sonde in ons menslike bestaan, sodat ons kan voldoen aan die vereiste van die wet – ons wat nou nie meer volgens ons sondige natuur lewe nie, maar volgens die Gees.

Daarom dan, my broers en susters, is dit noodsaaklik dat ons die druk van ons sondige natuur sal weerstaan en nie daarvolgens sal lewe nie. Want as die sondige natuur julle lewe beheer, gaan julle die dood tegemoet. Maar as julle deur die Gees die werke van julle sondige natuur doodmaak, sal julle werklik lewe.

Want almal wat hulle laat lei deur die Gees van God – hulle is God se kinders. Die Gees wat julle ontvang het, is nie 'n Gees wat weer van julle vreesbevange slawe maak nie. Julle het die Gees van ware kindwees ontvang en deur hierdie Gees roep julle uit tot God: Abba² – ons Vader. Want die Gees self bevestig teenoor ons eie gees dat ons God se kinders is. En as ons God se kinders is, maak Hy ons ook sy erfgename. Saam met Christus deel ons in God se rykdom. As ons bereid is om saam met Christus te ly, sal ons sekerlik ook deel in sy heerlikheid.

Ek weet vir seker dat ons huidige lyding hoegenaamd nie vergelyk kan word met die heerlikheid waarmee God ons gaan verras nie.

En ons weet dat God alles ten goede laat saamwerk vir hulle wat Hom liefhet, hulle wat geroep is volgens sy doel vir hulle lewe.

Wat sal ons dan van al hierdie wonderlike dinge sê? As God aan ons kant is, wie kan ooit téén ons wees? As God nie sy eie Seun gespaar het nie, maar Hom ter wille van ons almal oorgegee het, sal Hy nie saam met Hom ook alle ander dinge aan ons skenk nie? Wie sal dit waag om ons aan te kla as God ons spesiaal uitgekies het? God is immers die Een wat ons vryspreek. Wie sal ons veroordeel? Christus Jesus is tog die Een wat vir ons gesterf het, wat boonop ook opgestaan het, wat op die ereplek langs God sit en wat daar vir ons pleit. Kan enigiets ons ooit van Christus se liefde skei? Sal dinge soos lyding of benoudheid of vervolging, honger of koue, of gevaar of doodsdreiging dit regkry? Selfs die Skrif verklaar tog:

“Om u ontwil bedreig die dood ons die hele dag
en word ons as slagskape beskou.”

Tog is ons ten spyte van al hierdie dinge besig om 'n klinkende oorwinning te behaal – deur Christus wat sy liefde so duidelik aan ons bewys het. Een ding weet ek vas en seker: Niks kan ons ooit van Christus se liefde skei nie. Nie dood of lewe of engele of duiwelse magte nie; nie ons vrees vir vandag of ons kommer oor môre nie; ook nie bo-aardse magte nie. Ja, hoegenaamd niks daarbo of onder in die

dieptes of elders in die skepping sal ons ooit kan skei van die liefde wat God in Christus Jesus ons Here vir ons het nie.

Nou wil ek julle baie ernstig vra, broers en susters: As julle dink aan alles wat God in sy groot barmhartigheid vir julle gedoen het, gee dan julleself aan Hom as 'n lewende en heilige offer. Dit is dié soort offer waarvan Hy hou, en wat julle diens aan God werklik sinvol maak. Moenie julle leefstyl aanpas by die gedragspatrone van hierdie wêreld nie, maar laat God julle omvorm deurdat Hy julle denkpatrone vernuwe. Dan sal julle goed kan onderskei wat Hy wil hê dat julle moet doen, naamlik dit wat werklik goed en aanvaarbaar en volmaak is.

Namens Hom wat my in sy genade tot sy apostel gemaak het, sê ek aan elkeen van julle dat jy nie jouself moet oorskat nie, maar dat jy jouself nugter moet beoordeel volgens die geestelike toerusting wat God aan jou toebedeel het. Ons besit elkeen een liggaam wat uit baie ledemate bestaan en wat elkeen sy eie spesiale funksie het. Net so is dit ook met Christus se liggaam. Al is ons baie, vorm ons saam een liggaam omdat ons aan Christus verbind is, en as ledemate van hierdie één liggaam hoort ons saam en het ons mekaar nodig. Ons het gawes wat van mekaar verskil volgens die genade wat God aan elkeen van ons gegee het. Ons moet hierdie vermoëns reg gebruik. As God aan jou die gawe gegee het om te profeteer, moet jy dit aanwend in ooreenstemming met ons geloofsoortuigings. As dit is om ander te dien, doen dit met oorgawe. As jy onderrig gee, gee dan kwaliteitonderrig. As dit is om ander op te beur, lê jou daarop toe. As jy materiële ondersteuning kan gee, doen dit sonder bymotiewe. As God aan jou leierseenskappe gegee het, hanteer dit met toewyding. En as jy die gawe het om ander in hulle nood by te staan, doen dit met 'n vrolike hart.

Maar noudat ek my werk in hierdie gebiede voltooi het, en na al die baie jare wat ek gretig daarna uitgesien het om julle te besoek, wil ek dit doen terwyl ek na Spanje onderweg is. Ek hoop om julle op my deurreis na Spanje te sien. Nadat ek my eers vir 'n tydjie aan die samesyn met julle verlustig het, kan julle my dan verder na Spanje toe stuur. Maar voor my koms na julle toe, moet ek nou eers Jerusalem toe om 'n geskenk aan die gelowiges daar te gaan aflewer. Julle sien, die gelowiges in Griekeland het op die goeie gedagte gekom om geld in te samel vir die armes onder die gelowiges in Jerusalem. Hulle het dit gedoen onder die besef dat hulle so baie aan daardie gelowiges

verskuldig is. Omdat die Joodse gelowiges bereid was om soveel geestelike seëninge met die nie-Joodse nasies te deel, is die minste wat hulle kan doen om die Joodse gelowiges met materiële dinge te help. As ek dit dan afgehandel het en alles rondom hierdie insameling veilig afgerond het, wil ek by julle langs na Spanje toe reis. As ek na julle toe kom – dit weet ek vir seker – sal Christus vir my ’n ryke seën gee om vir julle te bring.

Broers en susters, in die Naam van ons Here Jesus Christus en omdat die Heilige Gees ons in liefde saambind, smee ek julle dringend: Worstel saam met my op julle knieë voor God dat Hy my sal red uit die hande van die ongelowige Jode in Jerusalem en dat die gelowiges daar positief sal wees oor die kollekte wat ek vir hulle bring. Dan sal ek, as God wil, vol blydschap na julle toe kom om julle teenwoordigheid te geniet en uit te rus. Mag God, wat aan ons sy vrede gee, met julle almal wees. Amen.

Nadat hy deur Masedonië gereis het en baie mense daar bemoedig het, het Paulus besluit om na Jerusalem te gaan. Hy het ’n dringende oproep van God ervaar om terug te gaan daarheen, alhoewel hy ’n gevoel gehad het dat daar swaarkry op hom wag. Lukas die dokter het hierdie keer saam met Paulus gereis en het in die boek Handeling 19 ’n wonderlike eerstehandse verslag neergepen van hulle laaste gedeelde ervarings.

¹**Petrus:** Grondteks Sefas, die Aramese naam van Petrus.

²**Abba:** Die Aramese woord vir vader

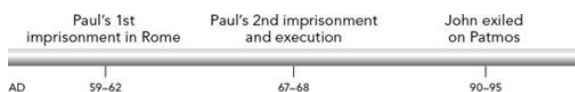
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Paul's Final Days

WE WENT ON AHEAD to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Chios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. Paul had decided

to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.



“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day.

Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem.

In the face of a warning as strong as the prophetic word through Agabus, most people would seek shelter far from the anticipated danger. Yet Paul had a calling and would not flinch. His sense of personal safety was vested in God alone. Arriving in Jerusalem, Paul was warmly received by the believers there, and they were excited to hear what God had done among the Gentiles through Paul's ministry. Paul then went to the temple, and his enemies saw their chance. Paul took the opportunity to tell his story once again—that Jesus was alive and had appeared to him in a miraculous vision on the Damascus road.

Some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place." (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city

of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!"

As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?"

Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

"About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

“Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

“What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

“Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’

“Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging

dust into the air, the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."

The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"

"Yes, I am," he answered.

Then the commander said, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

Those who were standing near Paul said, "How dare you insult God's high priest!"

Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.” When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. More than forty men were involved in this plot. They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”

He said: "Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."

Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

He wrote a letter as follows:

Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was

from Cilicia, he said, “I will hear your case when your accusers get here.” Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.

Paul’s arrest resulted from anything but criminal behavior, and the years he spent waiting for Roman justice would have broken most people. None of the officials he faced could find legal fault with him (the charge was sedition), yet no one would release him for fear of political repercussions. The Roman governor Felix held Paul in custody at Caesarea for two years, sending for him frequently in hope that Paul would offer him a bribe. Finally Felix was recalled to Rome for failing, among other things, to control local insurrection.

The Jewish leaders immediately asked the new governor, Festus, to transfer Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Paul, a Roman citizen, was forced to exercise his right of appeal to Caesar in order to avoid the grave danger of going to Jerusalem. Next, Paul appeared before King Herod Agrippa II. Agrippa and Festus agreed that Paul wasn’t guilty of any crime. But Paul had made an appeal to Caesar, so the Roman Imperial Court would finally get the privilege of disposing of his case.

Paul’s defense before these authorities was more a continuation of his life work than a defendant’s plea for justice. Paul tried to show them how important faith in Jesus was — for them and everyone! They refused to respond and placed Paul on a ship to Rome.

When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold

our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them, "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic¹ Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food — you haven’t eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Altogether there were 276 of us on board. When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul’s life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. Paul gathered a pile

of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live." But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island — it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I

am bound with this chain.”

They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

“Go to this people and say,

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;

you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

For this people’s heart has become calloused;

they hardly hear with their ears,

and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts

and turn, and I would heal them.’

“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ — with all boldness and

without hindrance!

While Paul was under house arrest in Rome, awaiting his trial before Caesar, he penned a letter to his beloved friends in Ephesus. This letter was probably intended to be circulated and read in several churches in addition to the one at Ephesus. It was a passionate review of God's love through Jesus and a call for all believers to live in unity. As Paul's life was nearing an end, his heart overflowed with joy and praise at God's wonderful story of redemption in Jesus the Messiah.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment — to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is

the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (which is done in the body by human hands) — remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who

were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church

submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” — which is the first commandment with a promise — “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Peace to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

It appears that Paul was released from house arrest in Rome in AD 62 and embarked on a final missionary journey to Asia Minor, Crete, Greece and perhaps Spain. He was imprisoned again in Rome, but this time he languished in a cold dungeon, chained like a common criminal. Paul was martyred during the reign of the emperor Nero in AD 67 or 68. During his final days, he wrote one last letter—a personal letter to Timothy, his coworker and “son in the faith.” To distinguish it from Paul’s earlier letter to Timothy, this letter is known as “Second Timothy” in the New Testament. Here, the beloved apostle pours out his heart with a mixture of loneliness, tenacious faith and concern for his fellow believers during this time of persecution under

Nero.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my dear son:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. Similarly, anyone who competes as an

athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings — what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

Paul wasn't the only apostle to be martyred. Tradition says that John, the author of a lofty and mysterious vision called "Revelation," was the oldest and last surviving member of Jesus' original disciples. By the time he wrote this book, it's likely that the other disciples had been killed (according to tradition, Peter was crucified upside down) or had wandered into regions where news of them was lost to distance and time. John was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote of the vision and revelation he received.

1Adriatic: In ancient times the name referred to an area extending well south of Italy.

Paulus se laaste dae

Paulus is landlangs Assus toe, maar ons is vooruit na die skip toe en het na Assus gevaar, waar Paulus afgespreek het dat hy aan boord sou gaan. Hy het ons daar gekry; ons het hom aan boord geneem en Mitilene toe gevaar. Die volgende dag het ons by Chios verbygevaar. Die dag daarna het ons by Samos aangedoen, en nog 'n dag later het ons Milete bereik. Paulus het reeds voorheen besluit om by Efese verby te vaar sodat hy nie nog langer in die provinsie Asië tyd hoef deur te bring nie. Hy was haastig om, as dit kon, op Pinksterdag in Jerusalem te wees.

Maar Paulus het van Milete af 'n boodskap na Efese toe gestuur om die ouderlinge van die gemeente te ontbied. Toe hulle by hom kom, sê hy vir hulle: “Julle weet dat ek die hele tyd, van die eerste dag af dat ek in die provinsie Asië gekom het, die Here met my hele wese in alle nederigheid gedien het, en dat dit met trane gepaardgegaan het. Dan was daar ook die beproewings wat oor my gekom het vanweë die komplotte van sommige Jode. Julle weet ook dat ek nooit weggeskram het van die waarheid toe ek by julle gepreek en julle in die



openbaar en in julle huise onderrig het nie. Ek het één boodskap vir Jode én Grieke gehad: dat hulle hulle tot God moet bekeer en in ons Here Jesus moet glo.

“En nou is ek op pad Jerusalem toe, gebind deur die Gees. Wat dáár met my gaan gebeur, weet ek nie. Wat ek wel weet, is dat die Heilige Gees my in elke stad verseker dat gevangenskap en vervolging voorlê. Al is my lewe kosbaar, ag ek dit van geen waarde as ek nie my lewenstaak en my bediening wat ek van die Here Jesus gekry het, kan klaarmaak nie: Om die Goeie Nuus te verkondig dat God mense liefhet sonder dat hulle iets hoef te doen om dit te verdien.

“En nou is dit duidelik: Ek weet dat nie een van julle my weer sal sien nie – julle onder wie ek rondgegaan en die koningsheerskappy van God verkondig het. Daarom stel ek dit vandag duidelik aan julle dat dit nie my skuld is as enigeen van julle verlore gaan nie, want ek het nie weggeskram daarvan om die volle plan van God aan julle te verkondig nie. Pas julle self op en die hele kudde oor wie die Heilige Gees julle as ouderlinge aangestel het. Julle moet as herders die kerk van God versorg, dié kerk wat Hy vir Hom verkry het deurdat sy eie Seun gesterf het.”

Toe Paulus klaar gepraat het, het hy saam met hulle almal gekniel en gebid. Almal het baie gehuil en Paulus omhels en hom gesoen. Hulle was veral hartseer oor sy stelling dat hulle hom nie weer sou sien nie. Toe het hulle hom skip toe gevat.

Ons het van Tirus af die seereis voortgesit na Ptolemaïs. Daar het ons die gelowiges gegroet en ’n dag by hulle gebly. Die volgende dag het ons vertrek en in Sesarea aangekom. Ons het by die evangelis Filippus, een van die sewe, tuisgegaan. Hy het vier ongetroude dogters gehad met die gawe om te profeteer.

Ons was reeds ’n hele paar dae daar toe ’n profeet met die naam Agabus van Judea af daar aankom. Toe hy ons kom opsoek, het hy Paulus se belt gevat en sy eie voete en hande daarmee vasgebind. Toe sê hy: “Só sê die Heilige Gees: ‘Die man wie se belt dit is hierdie – die Jode in Jerusalem sal hom net so vasbind en hom in die hande van nie-Jode uitlewer.’”

Toe ons dit hoor, het ons en die plaaslike gelowiges Paulus gesmeek om nie Jerusalem toe te gaan nie. Sy reaksie was egter: “Waarom wil julle my hart sag maak met julle huilery? Julle weet mos ek is bereid om ter wille van die Naam van die Here Jesus nie net in Jerusalem gevange geneem te word nie, maar selfs ook te sterf.” Toe hy nie tot ander insigte gebring kon word nie, het ons met dié woorde berus: “Laat dan die wil van die Here geskied.”

Hierna het ons opgepak en Jerusalem toe vertrek.

In die aangesig van ’n waarskuwing so sterk soos die profetiese woord deur Agabus, sou die meeste mense skuiling gesoek het baie ver van die verwagte gevaar af. Maar Paulus het ’n roeping gehad en het nie afgewyk nie. Sy gevoel van persoonlike veiligheid het in God alleen berus. Toe hy in Jerusalem aankom, is Paulus hartlik ontvang deur die Christene daar, en hulle was opgewonde om te hoor wat God deur

Paulus se bediening onder die nie-Jode gedoen het. Paulus het toe na die tempel gegaan en sy vyande het hulle kans waargeneem. Paulus het van die geleentheid gebruik gemaak om weer sy storie te vertel – dat Jesus lewe en in 'n wonderbaarlike visioen op die Damaskuspad aan hom verskyn het.

Jode van die provinsie Asië het vir Paulus by die tempel gesien en 'n hele skare teen hom aangehits. Hulle het Paulus gegryp en geskreeu: “Al julle Israeliete, kom help! Hier is die man wat deur sy onderrig almal oral teen ons volk en teen ons wet en teen die tempel beïnvloed. Nou het hy boonop nog Grieke hier ingebring en hierdie tempel wat aan God gewy is, ontheilig!”(Hulle het kort tevore Trofimus, 'n nie-Jood van Efese, saam met Paulus in die stad gesien en verkeerdelik die afleiding gemaak dat Paulus hom in die tempel ingebring het.)

Die hele stad het in beroering gekom en 'n betoging het begin. Hulle het Paulus by die tempel uitgesleep, en die deure is dadelik toegesluit. Hulle het hom probeer vermoor toe die offisier oor duisend man van die Romeinse garnisoen hoor dat die hele Jerusalem in oproer is. Hy het onmiddellik met soldate en offisiere op hulle afgestorm. Toe die betogers die offisier oor duisend man en sy soldate sien kom, het hulle opgehou om Paulus aan te rand.

Die offisier het Paulus toe gearresteer en hom met twee kettings laat boei. Hy vra toe die betogers wie die man is en wat hy gedoen het. Sommige het dít en ander weer dát geskreeu. Daar was só 'n rumoer dat hy nie kon uitvind wat presies aan die gang is nie. Gevolglik het hy beveel dat Paulus kaserne toe gevat moes word. Toe Paulus by die trappe kom, moes die soldate hom dra, só gewelddadig het die skare geword. 'n Klomp is agterna en het geskreeu: “Weg met hom!”

Net voor Paulus die barakke ingebring is, sê hy vir die offisier: “Verskoon my, kan ek u iets vra?”

“Ken jy tog nie Grieks nie!” reageer die offisier. “Dan is jý nie die Egiptenaar wat onlangs 'n opstand gelei en met 4 000 ekstremiste die woestyn ingetrek het nie?”

“Ek,” het Paulus geantwoord, “is 'n Jood van Tarsus in Silisië, 'n burger van 'n belangrike stad. Ek versoek u: Laat my toe om die mense toe te spreek.”

Die offisier het ingewillig, en Paulus het op die trappe gaan staan en met sy hand vir die mense beduie om stil te bly. Dit het doodstil geword, en hy het hulle in Aramees, hulle moedertaal, toegesprek. “Geagte broers en vaders, luister na my verdediging teenoor julle oor

hierdie saak.”

Toe hulle hoor dat hy hulle in Aramees toespreek, het hulle nog stiller geword.

Hy gaan toe voort: “Ek is ’n Jood wat in Tarsus in Silisië gebore is, en hier in Jerusalem het ek grootgeword en my opvoeding by Gamaliël gekry. Aan sy voete het ek geleer om ons Joodse wet streng na te kom. Ek het ’n kampvegter vir God geword, net soos julle almal vandag is. Ek het jag gemaak op ‘Die Pad’ tot die dood toe. Mans én vroue het ek gearresteer en in tronke laat stop. Só kan selfs die hoofpriester vir my getuig, en die hele Joodse Raad. Van hulle het ek selfs briewe aan ons volksgenote in Damaskus gekry om ook dáár hierdie mense te gaan arresteer en vir strafoplegging Jerusalem toe te bring.

“Juis toe ek op pad was, sommer naby Damaskus, het daar teen die middag skielik ’n sterk lig uit die hemel om my gestraal. Ek het op die grond neergeval en ’n stem vir my hoor sê: ‘Saul, Saul, waarom vervolg jy My?’

“Wie is U, Meneer?’ het ek gereageer.

“Ek is Jesus van Nasaret,’ het Hy my geantwoord. ‘Dit is vir Mý wat jy vervolg.’ Die mense saam met my het wel die lig gesien, maar nie die stem gehoor van Hom wat met my praat nie.

“Toe vra ek: ‘Wat moet ek doen, Here?’

“Die Here sê toe vir my: ‘Staan op en gaan Damaskus binne, en dáár sal alles wat God bepaal het dat jy moet doen, aan jou meegedeel word.’ Ek is deur my reisgenote Damaskus aan die hand binnegelei, want die helder lig het gemaak dat ek niks kon sien nie.

“’n Man met die naam Ananias het daar gebly. Hy het nougeset volgens die Joodse wet gelewe, en by al die Jode dáár ’n goeie naam gehad. Hy het na my toe gekom, by my kom staan en vir my gesê: ‘Saul, broer, sién weer!’ En oombliklik is my sig herstel en het ek hom gesien!

“Toe sê hy: ‘Die God van ons voorvaders het jou uitgekies om sy wil te ken, en om die Regverdige te sien en Hom te hoor praat. Jy sal inderdaad vir alle mense sy getuie wees van wat jy gesien en gehoor het. En nou, waarom nog wag? Staan op, laat jou doop en jou sondes afwas. Jy het mos sy Naam aangeroep.’

“Ek is terug Jerusalem toe, en terwyl ek by die tempel besig was om te bid, het ek ’n buitengewone geestelike ervaring gehad. Ek het die Here gesien en Hy het vir my gesê: ‘Maak gou! Gee dadelik pad uit Jerusalem. Hierdie mense sal verseker nie jou getuienis oor My

aanvaar nie.’

“Toe het ék teëgestribbel: ‘Maar, Here, hulle weet dat ék die man is wat oral in die sinagoges die mense wat in U glo, gearresteer en laat slaan het. En toe u getuie Stefanus vermoor is, het ek self hulle ondersteun. Ek het sy moordenaars se klere opgepas!’

“Toe sê die Here vir my: ‘Gáán! Ék wil jou ver weg stuur, na die nie-Joodse nasies toe.’”

Die skare het na hom geluister tot op hierdie punt, en toe het hulle uit een mond begin skreeu: “Weg van die aarde af met so ’n vent! Só iemand behoort verseker nie te bly lewe nie!”

Hulle het aanhou skreeu, hulle bo-klere uitgepluk en stof in die lug opgegooi. Die offisier oor duisend man het Paulus toe die kaserne laat inbring en bevel gegee dat hy gegésel moes word om hom sy misdaad te laat bely. Die offisier wou agterkom hoekom die skare Paulus so uitgejou het. Hulle het hom klaar met rieme vasgebind gehad vir die géseling toe Paulus vir die offisier oor honderd man wat daar naby staan, vra: “Is dit wettig dat julle ’n Romeinse burger gésel, en boonop nog sonder verhoor?”

Die offisier oor honderd man gaan toe na die offisier oor duisend man en vra: “Wat is u van plan om te doen? U moet besef hierdie man is ’n Romeinse burger!”

Die offisier oor duisend man gaan vra toe vir Paulus: “Sê vir my, ís jy ’n Romeinse burger?”

“Ja,” het Paulus geantwoord.

“Ek is ook een,” het die offisier oor duisend man gereageer, “en hierdie burgerreg het my ’n klomp geld gekos!”

“Maar ék is as ’n burger gebore!” het Paulus gesê.

Die soldate wat hom moes gésel om hom te laat praat, het hom dadelik laat staan, en selfs die offisier oor duisend man het bang geword toe hy besef dat Paulus ’n Romeinse burger is en dat hy hom vir die géseling laat vasbind het.

Die offisier oor duisend man het die volgende dag sy boeie laat afhaal en die priesterhoofde en die hele Joodse Raad vir ’n vergadering opgeroep. Hy het Paulus laat inbring, want hy wou agterkom presies waarom hy deur die Jode aangekla was.

Paulus het die Joodse Raad reguit in die oë gekyk en begin praat: “Geagte broers, met ’n absoluut goeie gewete het ek my lewe tot vandag toe in diens van God gele!”

Toe het die hoofpriester Ananias die mense wat by Paulus staan, beveel om hom op die mond te klap. Daarop sê Paulus vir hom: “God

gaan jǒu klap, jou skynheilige! Hier sit jy om my volgens ons wet te verhoor, maar in stryd met die wet beveel jy dat ek geklap moet word!”

Die mense by Paulus sê toe vir hom: “Dis die hoofpriester van God wat jy so uitskel!”

“Jammer, broers. Ek het nie besef hy is die hoofpriester nie,” het Paulus gereageer. “Daar staan inderdaad geskryf: ‘n Leier van jou volk mag jy nie beledig nie.’”

Paulus het besef dat ’n deel van die Joodse Raad Sadduseërs was en ’n ander deel Fariseërs, en daarom roep hy toe in die raad uit: “Geagte broers, ek is ’n Fariseër en ek is uit ’n Fariseërfamilie. Dit is oor my toekomsverwagting oor die opstanding van die dooies dat ek verhoor word!”

Toe hy dit sê, het die Fariseërs en die Sadduseërs onder mekaar begin stry, en die vergadering het verdeeld geraak, want die Sadduseërs sê daar is geen opstanding nie, en ook nie engele en geeste nie; die Fariseërs glo weer dat al drie bestaan.

’n Hewige woordewisseling het toe ontstaan. Sommige van die skrifkenners uit die Fariseërparty het opgespring en baie heftig hulle saak gestel: “Ons vind niks slegs in hierdie man nie,” het hulle geskreeu. “Miskien het ’n gees of ’n engel met hom gepraat.” Die bakleiery het só erg geword dat die offisier oor duisend man bang was dat hulle Paulus uitmekaar sou skeur. Daarom het hy sy eenheid beveel om hom tussen hulle te gaan uithaal en terug te bring kaserne toe.

Daardie nag het die Here by Paulus gestaan en vir hom gesê: “Hou moed! Net soos jy hier in Jerusalem oor My getuig het, só moet jy ook in Rome doen.”

Toe dit dag word, het die Jode ’n komplot gesmee. Hulle het gesweer dat hulle nie sou eet of drink voordat hulle Paulus doodgemaak het nie. Meer as 40 mense het só saamgesweer. Hulle het na die priesterhoofde en die familiehoofde gegaan en gesê: “Ons het ons met ’n eed verbind om nie aan iets te proe totdat ons Paulus dood het nie. Julle en die Joodse Raad moet die offisier oor duisend man laat weet dat Paulus weer voor julle gebring moet word. Julle kan voorgee dat julle sy saak noukeuriger wil ondersoek. Ons is reg om hom voor sy aankoms permanent uit die weg te ruim.”

Paulus se susterskind het egter gehoor van die hinderlaag. Hy is na die kaserne toe en het by die barakke ingekom en Paulus ingelig.

Paulus roep toe een van die offisiere oor honderd man en sê vir

hom: “Vat hierdie jong man na die offisier oor duisend man toe, want hy het iets om aan hom te rapporteer.”

Hy vat hom toe na die offisier oor duisend man toe en sê: “Paulus, die gevangene, het my geroep en my gevra om hierdie jong man na u toe te bring omdat hy iets het om aan u te rapporteer.”

Die offisier vat hom toe aan die hand, gaan met hom eenkant toe en vra vir hom: “Wat is dit wat jy aan my wil rapporteer?”

Hy het geantwoord: “Die Jode het ooreengekom om u te vra om Paulus môre weer voor die Raad te bring, kwansuis om sy saak noukeuriger te ondersoek. U moet u nie deur hulle laat oorreed nie, want meer as 40 mans uit hulle geledere lê hom voor om hom te vermoor. Hulle het gesweer dat hulle nie sal eet of drink voordat hulle hom permanent uit die weg geruim het nie. Hulle is gereed en wag nou net vir instemming van u kant af.”

Die offisier het hom toe dié opdrag gegee: “Moenie vir iemand sê dat jy dit vir my vertel het nie.” En hy het die jong man laat gaan.

Die offisier oor duisend man het toe twee van die offisiere oor honderd man geroep en hulle beveel: “Maak 200 soldate, 70 perderuiters en 200 spiesvegters gereed om teen nege-uur vanaand Sesarea toe te vertrek. Sorg dat daar rydiere vir Paulus is, en bring hom veilig by goewerneur Feliks.”

Toe skryf hy hierdie brief:

Claudius Lisis skryf aan die hoog geagte goewerneur Feliks.

Groete!

Hierdie man is deur die Jode gearresteer en hulle was op die punt om hom te vermoor toe ek met my eenheid ingegryp het. Omdat ek agtergekom het dat hy ’n Romeinse burger is, het ek hom in beskerming geneem. Ek wou uitvind wat hulle beskuldiging teen hom is, en het hom daarom voor hulle Raad gebring. Ek het bevind dat die klag gaan oor twispunte in verband met hulle wet, verseker nie ’n klag wat die dood of tronkstraf verdien nie. Toe ek verneem het daar is ’n komplot teen die man, het ek hom dadelik na u toe gestuur. Sy aanklaers het ek aangesê om hulle klagte teen hom aan u voor te lê.

Die soldate het ooreenkomstig hulle opdrag vir Paulus gevat en hom dwarsdeur die nag begelei tot in Antipatris. Die volgende dag het hulle teruggekeer kaserne toe terwyl die berede soldate met hom Sesarea toe is. Toe hulle in Sesarea aankom, het hulle die brief vir die

goewerneur gegee en Paulus aan hom oorhandig. Hy het die brief gelees en Paulus gevra van watter provinsie hy is. Hy hoor toe dat hy van Silisië af kom. “Ek sal jou verhoor sodra jou aanklaers kom,” het die goewerneur gesê. Toe het hy beveel dat Paulus in die paleis van Herodes onder arres gehou word.

Paulus se arrestasie was allesbehalwe as gevolg van kriminele gedrag, en die jare wat hy moes wag vir Romeinse geregtigheid sou baie mense gebreek het. Nie een van die amptenare voor wie hy verskyn het, kon enige wetlike fout met hom vind nie (die klagte was opstoking), tog kon niemand hom vrylaat nie weens vrees vir politieke gevolge. Die Romeinse goewerneur Feliks het Paulus vir twee jaar in Sesarea aangehou, en hom verskeie kere laat haal in die hoop dat Paulus hom sou probeer omkoop. Uiteindelik is Feliks teruggeroep Rome toe, om onder andere plaaslike opstand te beheer.

Die Joodse leiers het onmiddellik vir die nuwe goewerneur, Festus, gevra om Paulus van Sesarea na Jerusalem oor te plaas. Paulus, 'n Romeinse burger, is gedwing om sy reg op appèl na die keiser te gebruik om die gevaar wat die terugkeer na Jerusalem ingehou het, te ontduik. Volgende het Paulus voor koning Herodes Agrippa II verskyn. Agrippa en Festus het saamgestem dat Paulus nie skuldig was aan enige misdaad nie. Maar Paulus het hom op die keiser beroep; daarom sou die Romeinse keiserlike hof die voorreg geniet om van sy saak ontslae te raak.

Paulus se verdediging voor hierdie gesag was eerder 'n voortgang van sy lewenswerk as 'n verdediger se beroep op geregtigheid. Paulus het vir hulle probeer wys hoe belangrik geloof in Jesus is – vir hulle en al die ander mense. Hulle het geweier om te reageer en het vir Paulus met 'n skip na Rome gestuur.

Toe daar besluit is dat ons per skip Italië toe moes reis, het hulle Paulus en 'n paar ander gevangenes aan Julius, 'n offisier oor honderd man van die keiserlike regiment, oorhandig. Vir die vaart het ons aan boord gegaan van 'n skip van Adramittium wat by verskeie hawens van die provinsie Asië sou aandoen. Saam met ons was Aristargus, 'n Masedoniër van Tessalonika.

Ons het die volgende dag in Sidon aangekom. Julius was tegemoetkomend teenoor Paulus, en het hom toegelaat om na sy vriende toe te gaan om hom te voorsien van wat hy nodig het. Ons het daarvandaan weggevaar en is aan die beskutte kant van Siprus verby omdat die winde teen ons was. Ons het al langs die kus van Silisië en

Pamfilië gevaar tot by Mira in Lisië. Daar het die offisier 'n Aleksandrynse skip Italië toe gekry, en ons aan boord laat gaan. Ons het 'n klompie dae lank maar stadig kon vorder en met moeite naby Knidus gekom. Toe die wind te erg teen ons geraak het, het ons onder Kreta verbygevaar, verby Salmone. Ons het toe met moeite langs Kreta opgevaar en uiteindelik 'n plek met die naam Mooi Hawens bereik, naby die stad Lasea.

Ons het taamlik baie tyd verloor, en dit het al gevaarlik vir skeepvaart geword, want die winter het begin aanbreek. Paulus waarsku hulle toe: “Manne, ek sien dat ons vaart gevaarlik gaan wees en dat daar nie net groot skade aan die vrag en die skip gaan kom nie, maar ook aan ons lewens.” Die Romeinse offisier het egter meer waarde geheg aan die opinie van die skeepskaptein en die skeepseienaar as aan Paulus se woorde. Die hawe was nie gerieflik om daar te oorwinter nie, en die meeste van die bemanning wou liever daarvandaan wegvaar en Feniks probeer bereik om dáár te oorwinter. Feniks was 'n veilige hawe van Kreta omdat dit net na die suidwes- en noordweskant na die see toe oop was.

'n Ligte bries het uit die suide begin waai, en die bemanning het gedink dat hulle hulle plan sou kon uitvoer. Hulle het anker gelig en al langs die kus van Kreta gevaar. Maar dit was nie lank nie toe slaan daar 'n stormwind bekend as die Noordooster van die land af toe. Die skip is diepsee toe gedryf. Omdat dit onmoontlik was om die skip windop te hou, het ons ophou probeer, en ons is deur die wind voortgedryf.

Ons het onder 'n eilandjie met die naam Kauda verbygevaar en kon amper nie die reddingsbootjie van die skip (wat altyd op sleeptou was) onder beheer kry nie. Nadat die matrose die reddingsbootjie aan boord gebring het, het hulle reddingstoue gebruik om die onderkant van die skip te verstewig. Omdat hulle bang was dat die skip op die sandbanke van die Sirtis sou vasval, het hulle die dryfanker uitgegooi en die skip só deur die wind laat dryf.

Toe die storm ons aanhoudend só erg teister, het hulle die volgende dag die skip se vrag oorboord begin gooi. Die derde dag het hulle met hulle eie hande die skip se toerusting oorboord gegooi. Baie dae lank het die son en die sterre nie eers deurgekom nie en het die geweldige wind voortgewoed. Uiteindelik is alle hoop laat vaar dat ons gered sou word.

Vir 'n lang tyd het niemand sy mond aan kos gesit nie. Uiteindelik het Paulus tussen hulle gaan staan en gesê: “Manne, julle moes na my

geluister het en nie van Mooi Hawens in Kreta af weggevaar het nie. Dan sou ons hierdie ramp en skade gespaar gewees het. En nou vra ek julle: Hou moed! Daar sal verseker geen lewensverlies onder julle wees nie; net die skip sal tot niet gaan. Verlede nag het daar 'n engel van die God aan wie ek behoort en wat ek dien, langs my gestaan en vir my gesê: 'Hou op bang wees, Paulus. Jy moet nog voor die keiser verskyn. En dis nie al nie – om jou ontwil spaar God almal wat hier saam met jou op die skip is.' Daarom, hou moed, manne! Verseker vertrou ek op God dat alles presies só sal gebeur soos Hy vir my gesê het. Ons moet op 'n eiland strand."

Die veertiende nag wat ons so op die Adriatiese See¹ rondgedobber het, teen middernag, het die matrose vermoed dat hulle naby land kom. Hulle het 'n dieplood uitgegooi en 'n diepte van 36 meter gekry. 'n Bietjie verder het hulle weer gemeet, en toe kry hulle 27 meter. Hulle was bang ons loop naderhand op die rotse en het daarom vier ankers by die agterstewe uitgegooi en gebid dit moet dag word. Die matrose wou wegkom van die skip af en het die reddingsbootjie in die see begin neerlaat asof hulle ankers by die boeg van die skip wou laat sak. Paulus sê toe vir die Romeinse offisier en sy soldate: "As hierdie mense nie op die skip bly nie, kan julle nie gered word nie." Toe het die soldate die toue van die bootjie afgekap en hom laat afval.

Net toe die dag begin breek, het Paulus by almal aangedring om iets te eet: "Vandag is al die veertiende dag dat julle in spanning sonder kos wag, en niks eet nie," het hy gesê. "Daarom dring ek by julle daarop aan om nou iets te eet. Dit sal julle verseker help om te oorleef. Daar sal nie eers 'n haar van een van julle se koppe af verlore gaan nie!" Nadat hy dit gesê het, het hy brood gevat, God voor almal gedank, 'n stuk afgebreek en begin eet. Hulle het toe almal moed geskep en self ook begin eet. (Ons was altesaam 276 mense op die skip.) Nadat hulle genoeg geëet het, het hulle die skip nog ligter gemaak deur die res van die koringvrag oorboord te gooi.

Toe dit dag word, het hulle die land nie herken nie, maar hulle het 'n baai met 'n strand gesien. Hulle oorweeg toe om, indien moontlik, die skip daar te laat strand. Hulle het die ankers afgegooi en net daar in die see gelos. Terselfdertyd het hulle die toue wat die stuurspane vashou, losgemaak en die voorseil gehys sodat die wind die skip strand toe kon dryf. Maar die skip het op 'n rif geloop en gestrand. Die boeg het vasgesteek en kon nie beweeg nie. Die agterstewe het as gevolg van die geweld van die golwe begin opbreek.

Die plan van die soldate was om die gevangenes dood te maak om

te keer dat hulle sou uitswem en ontsnap. Maar die Romeinse offisier wou Paulus red en het hulle gekeer om hulle plan uit te voer. Hy het die mense wat kon swem, beveel om eerste oorboord te spring en die land te probeer haal. Die ander moes dan volg, sommige deur aan planke en ander deur aan wrakstukke vas te klou. Op hierdie manier het dit gebeur dat almal veilig aan land gekom het.

Nadat ons veilig aan wal gekom het, het ons uitgevind dat die eiland Malta genoem word. Die inboorlinge was buitengewoon vriendelik teenoor ons. Dit het begin reën en dit was koud. Hulle het toe 'n vuur aangesteek en ons almal genooi om daar te kom sit.

Paulus het 'n klomp hout bymekaargemaak en op die vuur gegooi. Van die hitte het daar 'n slang uitgekom en hom aan sy hand gepik. Toe die inboorlinge die gedierte aan sy hand sien hang, sê hulle vir mekaar: “Hierdie man is beslis 'n moordenaar. Al is hy uit die see gered, het geregtigheid hom nie toegelaat om te bly lewe nie.” Paulus het egter die ongedierte in die vuur afgeskud en geen nagevolge gehad nie. Hulle het verwag dat hy sou opswel of skielik morsdood neerslaan, maar nadat hulle 'n lang ruk gewag het en gesien het dat daar niks buitengewoons met hom gebeur nie, het hulle van mening verander en begin sê hy is 'n god.

Daar was 'n plaas in daardie omgewing wat aan die hoof van die eiland, 'n man met die naam Publius, behoort het. Hy het ons ontvang en drie dae lank vriendelik as sy gaste gehuisves. Dit het so gekom dat Publius se pa in die bed was, siek aan maagkoors. Paulus het na hom toe gegaan, en nadat hy gebid het, het hy sy hande op hom gesit en hom gesond gemaak. Ná hierdie voorval het ook die ander siekes op die eiland gekom, en is hulle gesond gemaak.

Hulle het ons met baie eerbewyse oorlaai, en toe ons wou wegvaar, het hulle vir ons alles opgelaai wat ons nodig gehad het.

Na drie maande is ons daar weg met 'n skip wat by die eiland oorwinter het, 'n Aleksandrynse skip met die Dioskuri as boegbeeld. Ons het by Sirakuse op die eiland Sisilië vasgemeer en drie dae daar oorgebly. Daarvandaan het ons verder gevaar en in Regium gekom, heel in die suide van Italië. Na nog 'n dag het daar 'n suidewind begin waai, en op die tweede dag was ons in Puteoli. Daar het ons gelowiges teëgekome wat ons uitgenooi het om sewe dae by hulle te bly. En só het ons Rome bereik. Die gelowiges in Rome het van ons gehoor, en party van hulle het ons by die Appiusmark kom ontmoet en ander by die Drie Herberge. Toe Paulus hulle sien, het hy God gedank en moed geskep. Na ons aankoms in Rome is Paulus toegelaat om op sy eie te

woon met 'n soldaat wat hom bewaak.

Drie dae later het hy die Joodse leiers na hom toe uitgenooi. Toe hulle bymekaargekom het, het hy vir hulle gesê: “Geagte broers, ek het niks teen ons volk of teen die gebruike van ons voorvaders gedoen nie, en tog is ek as gevangene uit Jerusalem aan die Romeine uitgelewer. Die Romeine het my verhoor en wou my loslaat omdat daar in my geval geen rede vir die doodstraf was nie. Maar omdat die Jode daarteen beswaar gemaak het, kon ek nie anders as om na die keiser te appelleer nie, alhoewel ek my volk nie van iets wil aankla nie. Dit is dan die rede waarom ek u laat roep het om u te sien en met u te praat. Ek is in hierdie boeie omdat ek glo dat die hoop van Israel, die Messias, reeds gekom het.”

Toe sê hulle vir hom: “Ons het geen briewe oor jou van Judea af gekry nie, en nie een van ons broers het enige nuus gebring of iets kwaads van jou gesê nie. Ons wil graag van jou hoor hoe jy oor die hele aangeleentheid dink, want ons verneem dat hierdie splintergroep oral omstrede is.”

Hulle het toe 'n dag met hom vasmag, en op daardie dag het daar nog meer mense na sy blyplek gekom. Van vroeg die môre tot laat die aand het Paulus vir hulle die koningsheerskappy van God verduidelik en daaroor getuig. Hy het hulle uit die wet van Moses en uit die profete probeer oortuig van Jesus. Sy woorde het party oortuig, maar ander wou nie glo nie. Toe 'n ernstige meningsverskil ontstaan, het hulle begin padgee. Paulus het egter nog vir oulaas een stelling teenoor hulle gemaak: “Hoe van toepassing is dit tog wat die Heilige Gees by monde van die profeet Jesaja vir julle voorvaders gesê het, naamlik:

“Gaan na hierdie volk toe en sê:

Julle sal my woorde hoor en tog nie verstaan nie.

Julle sal sien wat Ek doen, en dit tog nie werklik begryp nie.

Ja, die hart van hierdie volk het verhard,

en hulle hoor swaar met hulle ore,

en hulle het hulle oë toegemaak

sodat hulle nie dalk met hulle oë sien

en met hulle ore hoor

en met hulle hart begryp

en tot bekering kom en Ek hulle gesond maak nie.’

“Van nou af moet julle goed besef dat hierdie verlossing van God nou vir die nie-Joodse nasies beskikbaar gestel word. En hulle sal

luister.”

Paulus het 'n volle twee jaar lank in sy eie gehuurde huis gebly, en hy het almal ontvang wat by hom aangedoen het. Hy het verkondig dat God as koning regeer, en die mense alles oor die Here Jesus Christus geleer. Hy het dit ongehinderd en met die grootste vrymoedigheid gedoen.

Terwyl Paulus onder huisarres in Rome was en gewag het op sy verhoor voor die keiser, het hy 'n brief aan sy geliefde vriende in Efese geskryf. Hierdie brief was waarskynlik bedoel om onder verskeie kerke gesirkuleer en gelees te word, insluitend die een in Efese. Dit was 'n passievolle hersiening van God se liefde deur Jesus en 'n oproep vir alle gelowiges om in eenheid te leef. Soos Paulus se lewe sy einde genader het, het sy hart oorgeloop van vreugde en lofprijsing vir God se wonderlike storie van verlossing in Jesus die Messias.

Hierdie brief kom van Paulus. Ek is deur God gekies om 'n apostel van Christus Jesus te wees.

Ek skryf aan God se mense in Efese, hulle wat in Christus Jesus glo.

Mag die genade en vrede van God ons Vader en die Here Jesus Christus met julle wees.

Prys God, die Vader van ons Here Jesus Christus, voortdurend, want Hy is wonderlik goed vir ons! Deur wat Christus gedoen het, het Hy ons geseën met elke geestelike seëning wat daar in die hemelsfeer is. Deur wat Christus gedoen het, het God ons uitgekies. Omdat Hy ons liefhet, het Hy ons, al voor die wêreld gemaak is, uitgekies om Syne te wees en onberispelik in liefde voor sy aangesig te lewe. Deur wat Christus gedoen het, het God vooraf besluit om ons as sy kinders aan te neem. Hy het dit gedoen omdat dit is hoe Hy dit wou hê. Daarom prys ons God se grootheid. Deur sy Seun wat Hy liefhet, het Hy genade aan ons gegee.

Deur sy geliefde Seun is ons verlos deurdat Hy sy bloed vir ons gestort het. Ons oortredings is vergewe omdat God die rykdom van sy genade in oorfloed aan ons gegee het. God, wat al die wysheid en insig het, het sy geheime plan aan ons bekendgemaak. So het Hy dit reeds voorheen, met die fokus op Christus, goedgevind om hierdie plan in die volheid van die tye tot uitvoering te bring. Hierdie geheime plan is om alles wat in die hemel en op die aarde is, onder

een hoof te verenig; en hierdie hoof is Christus.

Die nuus dat julle in die Here Jesus glo en liefde aan al God se mense bewys, maak dat ook ek nie ophou om God vir julle te dank nie. Ek dink aan julle in my gebede en vra dat die God van ons Here Jesus Christus – die Vader aan wie al die heerlikheid behoort – aan julle geestelike wysheid en insig sal gee deurdat julle Hom persoonlik ken. Mag God julle harte so verlig dat julle sal insien watter wonderlike vooruitsig sy roeping inhou. Mag julle insien hoe 'n ryk heerlikheid dit is dat God sy eie mense vir Hom as 'n erfdeel verkry het. Mag julle insien hoe enorm groot die krag is wat God gebruik vir ons wat glo.

Dieselfde magtige sterkte was ook aan die werk toe God Christus uit die dood opgewek het en Hom in die hemel aan sy regterhand laat sit het. Nou is Christus hoog verhewe bo elke owerheid en gesag en krag en heerskappy, ja, elke noemenswaardige instansie, nie net in hierdie wêreld nie, maar ook in die wêreld wat kom. God het alle dinge onder sy beheer gestel en Hom ook as Hoof van alles aan die kerk gegee. Die kerk is sy liggaam, die volheid van Hom wat alles in elke opsig met sy teenwoordigheid vul.

As gevolg van julle verkeerde lewe en sondes was ook julle geestelik dood. Julle leefstyl destyds is bepaal deur hierdie bose wêreld, ja, deur die regeerder van die mag wat in die lug is. Dit is die gees wat nou nog werk in almal wat aan God ongehoorsaam is. Ons almal het vroeër so gelewe. Ons gedrag is bepaal deur ons sondige begeertes. Elke sondige wens wat in ons gedagtes opgekom het, het ons sommer net gedoen. Soos die ander mense was ons vanselfsprekend vir God se straf bestem. Maar God se ontferming is oorvloedig. Die liefde waarmee Hy ons liefgehad het, was so groot dat toe ons verkeerde lewe ons geestelike dood veroorsaak het, Hy ons saam met Christus lewend gemaak het. Dis dus God se genade wat maak dat julle verlos is! Omdat ons aan Christus Jesus verbind is, het God ons saam met Hom opgewek en saam met Hom 'n sitplek in die hemel gegee. So sal God ook in die tye wat kom, bewys dat Hy heeltemal oorloop van genade. Die goedheid wat God ons deur Christus Jesus gegee het, sal as bewys dien.

Dit is mos dié genade wat julle verlos het deurdat julle tot geloof gekom het. En julle verlossing kom nie uit julleself nie, maar is 'n gawe van God. Dit is nie die gevolg van julle dade nie. Niemand kan daarvoor grootpraat nie, want ons is God se handewerk. Hy het ons in ons eenheidsband met Christus Jesus só gemaak dat ons die goeie

werke wat Hy vir ons bestem het, kan uitlewe.

Dink daarom aan die tyd toe julle wat as nie-Jode gebore is, “onbesnedenes” genoem is deur dié wat “besnedenes” genoem word – al is die besnydenis net mensewerk aan die liggaam. Dink daaraan dat julle toe sonder Christus was, nie burgers van God se volk nie, uitlanders wat nie deel gehad het aan die beloftes van die verbonde nie. Julle was sonder toekomsverwagting en sonder God in die wêreld. Maar nou het julle wat toe ver weg was, deur julle verhouding met Christus naby gekom. Dit is moontlik gemaak deur Christus se dood aan die kruis.

Christus het inderdaad vrede tussen ons gebring. Deur sy liggaam aan die kruis te gee het Hy die twee groepe één gemaak; ja, die muur van vyandskap het Hy afgebreek. Hy het ’n einde gemaak aan die wet met sy voorskrifte. Hy het vrede gebring deur in Homself die twee groepe tot een nuwe mensheid te omskep. Ja, deur sy dood aan die kruis het Hy die vyandskap beëindig. Só het Hy albei groepe in een liggaam met God versoen. Hy het vrede kom verkondig vir hulle wat ver is, én vir hulle wat naby is. Dit is aan Hom te danke dat albei van ons deur een Gees toegang tot die Vader het.

Julle is dus nie meer uitlanders en bywoners nie, maar medeburgers van hulle wat aan God behoort. Ja, julle is lede van God se huisgesin wat gebou is op die fondament wat die apostels en die profete gelê het. Christus Jesus is self die hoekklip op wie die hele gebou, terwyl dit kunstig inmeekaargepas word, verrys tot ’n tempel wat aan die Here toegewy is. Deur julle verhouding met Hom word ook julle saam opgebou tot ’n gebou waarin God deur sy Gees woon.

Daarom kniel ek voor die Vader. Hy is die Vader van elke gemeenskap in die hemel en op die aarde. Mag Hy deur sy Gees uit die rykdom van sy Goddelike grootheid aan julle die krag gee om innerlik sterk te word. Dan sal Christus deur die geloof in julle harte woon, en sal julle in God se liefde gewortel en gegrondwes wees. Mag julle in staat wees om saam met al God se mense te begryp hoe breed en lank en hoe hoog en diep sy liefde is. Dan sal julle Christus se liefde, wat alle verstand te bowe gaan, beleef. Mag julle heeltemal met die volheid van God vervul word.

Hy moet geprys word – Hy wat mag het om deur die krag wat in ons werk, oneindig meer te doen as wat ons vra of dink om te vra. Die kerk wat aan Christus Jesus verbind is, moet Hom prys deur al die geslagte heen tot in alle ewigheid! Amen.

Ek doen dus 'n beroep op julle, ek wat 'n gevangene in diens van die Here is: Leef 'n lewe wat pas by die waardigheid van die roeping waarmee julle geroep is. Met totale beskeidenheid en sagmoedigheid, ja, met geduld moet julle mekaar in liefde verdra. Deur in vrede met mekaar te lewe, moet julle julle daarop toelê om die eenheidsband te bewaar wat die Gees bewerk het.

Daar is net één Gees, net soos julle net één toekomsverwachting het op grond van julle roeping – één Here, één geloof, één doop, één God, ons almal se Vader; Hy heers oor almal, werk deur almal en woon in almal.

Omdat julle respek het vir Christus, moet julle aan mekaar onderdanig wees.

Vroue, julle moet aan julle mans onderdanig wees, soos aan die Here. Op dieselfde manier wat Christus hoof is van die kerk, is 'n man hoof van sy vrou. Christus het sulke hoofskap uitgeoefen toe Hy die kerk verlos het. Soos die kerk aan Christus onderdanig is, moet julle, vroue, in alles elkeen aan julle eie man onderdanig wees.

Mans, julle moet julle vroue liefhê net soos Christus die kerk liefgehad het toe Hy sy lewe daarvoor gegee het om só die kerk aan God toe te wy nadat Hy die kerk met die water en deur die woord gereinig het en sodat Hy die kerk in al sy skoonheid voor Hom kan stel, nie met enige vlek of plooi of enige ander onsierlikheid nie, maar aan God toegewy en onberispelik. Op dieselfde manier moet mans hulle eie vroue liefhê. Hulle moet hulle liefhê asof hulle hulle eie liggame is. 'n Man wat sy eie vrou liefhet, het dus eintlik homself lief. 'n Mens haat mos nie jou liggaam nie, maar voed en versorg dit. Christus maak net so met ons, die kerk, omdat ons ledemate van sy liggaam is.

Daar staan mos: “'n Man sal weggaan van sy pa en ma en een word met sy vrou, en hulle twee sal een wees.” Dit is eintlik 'n diep geheim, en ek noem dit om die verhouding tussen Christus en die kerk te beskryf. Dit geld egter ook vir julle: Elkeen van julle moet sy eie vrou liefhê soos hy homself liefhet, en die vrou moet haar man respekteer.

Kinders, omdat julle aan die Here verbonde is, moet julle aan julle ouers gehoorsaam wees. Dit is mos die regte ding om te doen! “Eer jou vader en jou moeder” is die eerste van die Tien Gebooie waaraan 'n belofte verbind is: “Sodat dit met jou goed mag gaan en jy lank op die aarde mag lewe.”

En pa's, moenie julle kinders so behandel dat hulle verbitterd word nie, maar voed hulle op met dissipline en teregwysing wat die Here se

goedkeuring wegdra.

Mag God die Vader en die Here Jesus Christus vrede, liefde en geloof vir ons broers en susters gee. Mag God se genade met almal wees wat ons Here Jesus Christus met 'n blywende liefde liefhet.

Dit wil voorkom of Paulus in 62 n.C. vrygelaat is uit huisarres en op 'n laaste sendingreis na Klein-Asië, Krete, Griekeland en miskien Spanje vertrek het. Hy is weer gevange geneem in Rome, maar hierdie keer is hy toegesluit in kettings in 'n koue kerker soos 'n gewone misdadiger. Paulus is tydens die bewind van keiser Nero, in 67-68 n.C., gemartel. Gedurende sy laaste dae het hy 'n laaste brief geskryf – 'n persoonlike brief aan Timoteus, sy medewerker en “geliefde kind”. Om dit te onderskei van Paulus se vorige brief aan Timoteus, staan hierdie brief bekend as 2 Timoteus in die Nuwe Testament. Hier stort die geliefde apostel sy hart uit met 'n mengsel van eensaamheid, volhardende geloof en bekommernis vir die medegelowiges gedurende hierdie tyd van vervolging onder Nero.

Hierdie brief kom van Paulus, 'n apostel van Christus Jesus deur die wil van God, uitgestuur om ander te gaan vertel van die lewe wat Hy beloof het deur geloof in Christus Jesus.

Ek skryf aan Timoteus, my geliefde kind.

Mag God ons Vader en Christus Jesus ons Here aan jou genade, ontferming en vrede gee.

Timoteus, ek dank God vir jou. Hy is die God wat ek met 'n skoon gewete dien, net soos my voorouers gedoen het. Ek onthou jou voortdurend, dag en nag, in my gebede. Ek verlang om jou weer te sien, want ek onthou jou trane toe ons uitmekaar is. En ek sal vol vreugde wees as ons weer bymekaar is. Ek dink terug aan jou opregte geloof. Eers het jou ouma Loïs en jou ma Eunice hierdie geloof gehad en – daarvan is ek seker – jy het dit ook.

Jy moet dus nooit skaam wees om van ons Here te getuig nie. En moet jou ook nie vir my skaam nie, al is ek ook in die tronk ter wille van Christus. Met die krag wat God jou gee, moet jy gereed wees om saam met my vir die uitdra van die Goeie Nuus te ly. Dit is God wat ons verlos en gekies het om 'n toegewyde lewe te lei. Hy het dit gedoen, nie omdat ons dit verdien het nie, maar omdat dit sy plan was

lank voor die begin van die wêreld, naamlik om sy genade aan ons te bewys deur Christus Jesus. En nou het Hy dit alles aan ons duidelik gemaak deur die koms van Christus Jesus, ons Verlosser, wat die mag van die dood verbreek het en aan ons, deur die Goeie Nuus, die weg gewys het na die onverganklike lewe. En God het my gekies om 'n prediker te wees, 'n apostel en 'n leermeester van dié Nuus. Dit is waarom ek hier in die tronk ly. Maar ek is nie skaam daaroor nie, want ek ken die Een op wie ek vertrou en ek is seker dat Hy sal bewaar wat Hy aan my toevertrou het, tot op die dag van sy koms.

Timoteus, my kind, staan sterk in die genade wat God deur Christus Jesus aan jou bewys het. Vertrou die waarhede wat jy voor baie getuies van my gehoor het, toe aan betroubare mense wat bekwaam is om dit aan ander deur te gee. Verduur saam met my lyding soos 'n goeie soldaat van Christus Jesus. Geen soldaat raak verstrengeld in die beslommernisse van hierdie lewe nie, want dan kan hy die Een wat hom vir sy leer gewerf het, nie tevrede stel nie. 'n Atleet word nie gekroon as hy nie volgens die reëls deelneem nie. Hardwerkende boere is die eerste wat die vrug van hulle arbeid geniet. Dink na oor wat ek sê. Die Here sal jou help om al hierdie dinge beter te begryp.

Onthou voortdurend dat Jesus Christus uit koning Dawid se nageslag gebore is en dat Hy uit die dood opgewek is. Dit is die Goeie Nuus wat ek verkondig. En omdat ek hierdie Goeie Nuus verkondig, ly ek en is ek soos 'n misdadiger in kettings geslaan. Maar die woord van God kan nie vasgeketting word nie.

Maar jy, Timoteus, het my onderrig getrou gevolg, hoe ek lewe en wat my doel in die lewe is. Jy ken my geloof en hoe lank ek al gely het. Jy ken my liefde en my geduld en verdraagsaamheid. Jy weet hoeveel vervolging en lyding ek verduur het. Jy weet alles van hoe ek vervolgd is in Antiogië, Ikonium en Listra, maar die Here het my uit alles verlos. Ja, en almal wat 'n toegewyde lewe in verbondenheid aan Christus Jesus wil lei, sal vervolgd word. Maar bese mense en swendelaars sal voortgaan van kwaad tot erger. Hulle sal aanhou om mense te mislei, en hulle sal self mislei word.

Maar jý, bly getrou aan die dinge wat jy geleer het. Jy weet dit is waar, want jy weet jy kan dié vertrou wat jou geleer het. Jy ken die Heilige Skrif van kindsbeen af en dit het jou die wysheid gegee om die verlossing te ontvang wat deur geloof in Christus Jesus kom. Die hele Skrif is deur God geïnspireer en is nuttig om ons te onderrig, die verkeerde te weerlê, om ons tereg te wys en om die regte leefstyl by

ons te kweek. Dit is God se manier om sy mense voor te berei vir hulle taak, ten volle toegeerus vir elke goeie ding wat Hy wil hê hulle moet doen.

Wat my betref, word my lewe alreeds uitgegiet as 'n offer aan God. Die tyd van my dood is op hande. Ek het die goeie stryd gestry, ek het die wedloop voltooi, en ek het gelowig gebly. En nou wag die prys vir my: die lourierkrans vir 'n lewe in gehoorsaamheid wat die Here, die regverdige Beoordelaar, my sal gee op die groot dag van sy terugkeer. En dié prys is nie net vir my nie, maar vir almal wat gretig uitsien na sy heerlike verskyning.

Doen jou bes om so gou moontlik na my toe te kom. Demas het my verlaat omdat hy verlief geraak het op die dinge van hierdie lewe en toe na Tessalonika vertrek het. Kressens is weg na Galasië en Titus na Dalmasië. Net Lukas is by my. Gaan haal vir Markus en bring hom saam met jou wanneer jy kom, want hy kan my behulpsaam wees. Ek het Tigikus na Efese toe gestuur. Wanneer jy kom, onthou om die bakkleed wat ek by Karpus in Troas agtergelaat het, saam te bring. Bring ook my boeke, en veral my perkamente.

Paulus is nie die enigste apostel wat gemartel is nie. Volgens oorlewering was Johannes, die outeur van 'n verhewe en misterieuse visioen genaamd "Openbaring", die oudste en laaste oorlewende lid van Jesus se oorspronklike dissipels. Teen die tyd dat hy hierdie boek geskryf het, is dit waarskynlik dat die ander dissipels doodgemaak is (volgens oorlewering is Petrus onderstebo gekruisig) of na streke gegaan het waar nuus oor hulle weens afstand en tyd verlore geraak het. Johannes is verban na die eiland Patmos waar hy die visioen en openbaring wat hy gekry het, neergeskryf het.

¹**Adriatiese See:** Vir die antieke skrywers het die Adriatiese See baie verder gestrek as vandag. Dit het ook die deel van die Middellandse See tussen Kreta en Sisilië ingesluit.

31

The End of Time

THE REVELATION FROM JESUS CHRIST, which God gave him to

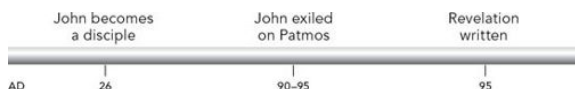
show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.



“Look, he is coming with the clouds,”

and “every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him”;

and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.”

So shall it be! Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of

Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

This blazing Living One, the risen Lord Jesus, then dictated letters to seven individual churches throughout Asia Minor, warning of problems and pitfalls in their faith. The letters imply that we live in a morally accountable universe, and those accounts will be "called in" at the end of history. God, firmly in control of his story, has set a day when patience will give way to a final judgment.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

"These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be

apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

“These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

“Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover

your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Now John's Revelation takes a turn from an exhortation of the seven churches to a series of mysterious and symbolic scenes. The curtains of heaven are rolled back, and John gets a glimpse of spiritual realities—including the final days of history when the utterly astounding glory of God and his plan for the world will be revealed.

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy

is the Lord God Almighty,'
who was, and is, and is to come."

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying:

"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,

because you were slain,

and with your blood you purchased for God

persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests

to serve our God,

and they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,

to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength

and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

be praise and honor and glory and power,

for ever and ever!”

The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

both great and small!”

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Don’t do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Jesus.”

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Soon after this story opened in the book of Genesis, God's battle against evil became evident in the Garden of Eden. Here at the end, the final battle will be engaged. When it's over, all the oppression, injustice and grief caused by Satan's side will be wrapped up and consigned to a place far from God's home. All the world's destruction and brokenness will give way to Jesus' promise of a new creation, a new environment, a new city of peace and freedom. It is here that Christians will forever enjoy the glory and holiness of God himself. This is very good news to God's children, but it will be a time of unspeakable horror for those who turn away from God.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will

inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor

will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God who inspires the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

"Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll."

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and with your fellow prophets and with all who keep the words of this scroll. Worship God!"

Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy."

"Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and

practices falsehood.

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.

He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

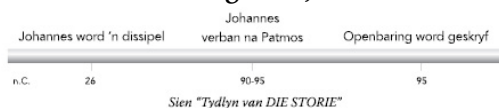
The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.

Die eindtyd

Dit is 'n openbaring wat van Jesus Christus af kom. God het dit aan Hom gegee om aan sy diensknegte bekend te maak wat binnekort moet gebeur. Hy het dit toe aan sy dienskneg Johannes gegee deur sy engel na hom toe te stuur. Johannes het getuigenis gelewer van alles wat hy gesien het: wat God gesê het en wat Jesus getuig het. Geseënd is dié een wat die woorde van dié profesie lees, asook dié wat dit hoor en gehoorsaam wat daarin geskryf staan, want die tyd van beslissing is naby.

Hierdie brief kom van Johannes en is gerig aan die sewe gemeentes wat in die provinsie Asië geleë is.

Genade en vrede aan julle, van Hom wat is en wat was en wat kom, en van die sewe Geeste wat voor sy troon is; en van Jesus Christus, die betroubare getuie, die eerste wat uit



die dood opgestaan het en wat heers oor die konings van die aarde.

Aan Hom wat ons liefhet en ons deur sy bloed van ons sondes verlos het, en ons laat deel in sy koninklike regering, aan Hom wat ons priesters vir God, sy Vader, gemaak het, aan Hom behoort die heerlikheid en die krag vir ewig en altyd. Amen.

Kyk, Hy kom met die wolke!

Elke oog sal Hom sien,

ook hulle wat Hom deurboor het;

al die nasies op aarde sal jammerlik oor Hom huil.

Ja, amen!

“Ek is die Alfa en die Omega,” sê die Here God, wat is en wat was en wat kom, die Almagtige.

Ek is Johannes, julle medegelowige. Deur ons hegte verhouding met Jesus deel ons saam in die swaarkry, maar ook in sy heerskappy en in die volharding. Dit het gebeur dat ek op die eiland Patmos beland het omdat ek die boodskap van God en die getuienis wat deur Jesus gelewer is, gepreek het. Op die Dag van die Here was ek in die greep van die Gees en het reg agter my 'n harde stem, soos 'n trompet, hoor sê: “Skryf wat jy sien in 'n boekrol neer en stuur dit aan die sewe gemeentes: na Efese, Smirna, Pergamum, Tiatira, Sardis, Filadelfia en Laodisea.”

Ek het toe omgedraai om te sien wie se stem dit is wat met my praat. Nadat ek omgedraai het, het ek sewe goue kandelare gesien en in die middel van die kandelare Iemand soos die Seun van die Mens. Hy het 'n kleed aangehad wat tot op sy voete gehang het en 'n goue band was om sy bors vasgemaak. Sy kop en sy hare was wit soos wol, so wit soos sneeu, en sy oë soos 'n vuurvlam. Sy voete was soos gepoleerde koper wat in 'n smeltoond gloei en sy stem soos die geluid van baie waterstrome.

In sy regterhand het Hy sewe sterre vasgehou en uit sy mond het 'n skerp swaard met twee snykante gekom. Sy gesig het helder geskyn soos die son in al sy felheid.

Toe ek Hom sien, het ek voor sy voete neergeval soos 'n lyk. Hy het sy regterhand op my gelê en gesê: “Hou op om bang te wees, Ek is die Eerste en die Laaste, en die Lewende. Ek was dood en kyk, nou leef Ek vir altyd en Ek het die sleutels van die dood en die doderyk.

“Skryf op wat jy gesien het: wat nou besig is om te gebeur en wat hierna gaan gebeur. En dit is die geheim van die sewe sterre wat jy in my regterhand gesien het en die sewe goue kandelare: Die sewe sterre is die sewe voorgangers van die sewe gemeentes en die sewe kandelare is die sewe gemeentes self.”

Hierdie vlamme Lewende Een, die opgestane Here Jesus, het toe briewe gedikteer aan sewe individuele kerke deur die hele Klein-Asië deur, waarin Hy hulle waarsku oor die probleme en slaggate in hulle geloof. Die briewe impliseer dat ons in 'n moreel verantwoordbare heeal bly, en daardie rekeninge sal opgeroep word aan die einde van die geskiedenis. God, volkome in beheer van sy storie, het 'n dag vasgestel wanneer geduld plek gaan maak vir die finale oordeel.

Skryf aan die voorganger van die gemeente in Efese:

Só sê Hy wat die sewe sterre in sy regterhand vashou en wat tussen

die sewe kandelare rondstap: Ek ken jou handel en wandel. Ek het ook jou harde werk en volharding raakgesien, en dat jy slegte mense nie kan verdra nie. Jy het ook navraag gedoen oor dié wat sê dat hulle apostels is, maar dit nie is nie. Jy het toe uitgevind dat hulle eintlik leuenaars is. Verder volhard jy en het jy ter wille van My baie verdra sonder om moeg te word.

Maar Ek het hierdie klag teen jou: dat jy jou eerste liefde versaak het. Dink terug aan hoe ver jy uitgesak het en kom tot inkeer, en doen weer wat jy aan die heel begin gedoen het. Anders kom Ek na jou toe en sal Ek jou kandelaar van sy staanplek af verwyder, as jy nie tot inkeer kom nie.

Maar daar is tog iets wat jy bly handhaaf het: Jy haat wat die Nikolaïete doen, net soos Ek dit ook haat.

Elkeen wat kan hoor, moet luister wat die Gees aan die gemeentes sê.

Elkeen wat aanhou oorwin, sal Ek laat eet van die boom van die lewe wat in die paradys van God staan.

Skryf aan die voorganger van die gemeente in Sardis:

Só sê Hy wat die sewe Geeste van God en die sewe sterre vashou: Ek ken jou handel en wandel. Ek weet ook dat jy daarvoor bekend is dat jy lewe, maar jy is dood.

Word wakker en herstel wat nog oor is, wat op die drumpel van die dood is. Jou optrede vind Ek nie gepas in die teenwoordigheid van my God nie. Probeer onthou hoe jy dit ontvang en gehoor het; gehoorsaam dit en kom tot inkeer. As jy nie wakker word nie, sal Ek skielik op jou afkom soos 'n dief, en jy sal nie weet presies wanneer Ek op jou afkom nie.

Maar jy het tog 'n klompie persone in Sardis wat nie hulle klere vuilgemaak het nie. Dit is hulle wat vir altyd saam met My in wit klere sal leef omdat hulle dit werd is. Die een wat aanhou oorwin, sal net so met wit klere aangetrek word. En Ek sal sy naam nooit uit die Boekrol van die Lewe vee nie, maar voor my Vader en sy engele getuig dat hy van my mense is.

Elkeen wat kan hoor, moet luister wat die Gees aan die gemeentes sê.

Skryf aan die voorganger van die gemeente in Laodisea:

So sê die Amen, die getroue en betroubare getuie, die oorsprong

van God se skepping: Ek ken jou handel en wandel. Ek weet dat jy nie koud of warm is nie. Was jy tog maar net koud of warm. Omdat jy so loutewarm is, nie warm nie en ook nie koud nie, is Ek op die punt om jou uit my mond te spoeg.

Jy sê: “Ek is ryk; ek het skatryk geword en het aan niks behoefte nie.” Jy besef nie dat jy ellendig en bejammerenswaardig is nie, armlastig, blind en kaal. Ek gee jou daarom die raad om by My goud te koop wat deur vuur gesuiwer is sodat jy ryk kan word; en koop vir jou wit klere om aan te trek sodat die skande van jou naaktheid nie algemeen sigbaar word nie; en koop ook oogsalf om aan jou oë te smeer sodat jy kan sien.

Ek berispe en straf almal wat Ek liefhet. Kry lewe en kom tot inkeer! Kyk, Ek staan by die deur en Ek klop. As jy my stem herken en die deur oopmaak, sal Ek na jou toe ingaan en ons sal die fees-ete saam geniet.

Die een wat aanhou oorwin, hom sal Ek toelaat om saam met My op my troon te sit, net soos Ek oorwin het en saam met my Vader op sy troon gaan sit het.

Elkeen wat kan hoor, moet luister wat die Gees aan die gemeentes sê.

Nou verander Johannes se Openbaring van 'n vermaning aan die sewe kerke in 'n reeks geheimsinnige en simboliese tonele. Die hemel se gordyne word teruggeskuif en Johannes kry 'n kykie op die geestelike realiteite – insluitend die laaste dae in die geskiedenis wanneer die glorie van God en sy plan vir die wêreld geopenbaar sal word.

Hierna het ek gekyk, en werklikwaar, 'n deur is oopgemaak in die hemel, en 'n stem wat ek vantevore al hard soos 'n trompet met my hoor praat het, het gesê: “Kom op hierheen, en Ek sal aan jou wys wat hierna moet gebeur.”

Onmiddellik was ek in die greep van die Gees. Ek het 'n troon in die hemel sien staan met Iemand wat daarop sit. En die Een wat sit, se voorkoms was net soos jaspis en karneool, terwyl daar 'n reënboog met die glans van smarag om die troon gehang het. Rondom die troon was daar 24 trone en op die trone het 24 ouderlinge gesit. Hulle het wit klere aangehad, met goue krone op hulle koppe. Van die troon se kant af het daar weerligstrale, rammelings en donderslae gekom. Reg voor die troon het sewe vlamme fakkels gebrand; dit is die sewe Geeste van God. Vlak voor die troon het dit gelyk soos 'n spieëlgladde see, soos kristal.

In die middel en rondom die troon het daar vier lewende wesens gestaan, met oë aan die voor- en agterkant. Die eerste lewende wese het soos 'n leeu gelyk, die tweede soos 'n bul, die derde het 'n gesig soos dié van 'n mens gehad, en die vierde het gelyk soos 'n vlieënde arend. Die vier lewende wesens het elkeen ses vlerke gehad wat rondom en aan die binnekant vol oë was. Hulle het dag en nag, sonder enige ruspouse, aanhou sê:

“Heilig, heilig, heilig
is die Here God die Almagtige,
Hy wat was en wat is en wat kom.”

Elke keer wanneer die lewende wesens heerlikheid, eer en dank toebring aan Hom wat op die troon sit, Hy wat vir altyd lewe, val die 24 ouderlinge in aanbidding neer voor Hom wat op die troon sit. Hulle aanbid Hom wat vir altyd lewe en sit hulle krone voor die troon neer en sê:

“U is waardig, Here ons God,
om die heerlikheid en die eer en die mag te ontvang
omdat U alle dinge geskape het;
deur u wil is alles wat bestaan, geskape.”

Ek het toe in die regterhand van Hom wat op die troon sit, 'n boekrol gesien, vol geskryf aan die binne én die buitekant, en deur sewe seëls deeglik verseël. Ek het ook 'n sterk engel gesien wat met 'n kragtige stem uitroep: “Wie is waardig genoeg om die boekrol oop te maak deur die seëls daarvan te breek?” Maar niemand in die hemel of op die aarde of onder die aarde was in staat om die boekrol oop te maak of daarin te kyk nie.

Ek het toe bitterlik gehuil omdat niemand gekry is wat waardig genoeg is om die boekrol oop te maak om daarin te kyk nie. Toe sê een van die ouderlinge egter vir my: “Hou op huil! Kyk, die Leeu uit die stam van Juda, die nakomeling van Dawid, het oorwin en kan die boekrol en sy sewe seëls oopmaak.”

Toe het ek tussen die troon en die vier lewende wesens en tussen die ouderlinge 'n Lam sien staan, soos Een wat geslag is. Hy het sewe horings en sewe oë gehad, dit is die sewe Geeste van God wat uitgestuur is oor die hele aarde. Hy het toe vorentoe getree en die boekrol geneem uit die regterhand van Hom wat op die troon sit. Net toe Hy die boekrol vat, het die vier lewende wesens en die 24

ouderlinge in aanbidding voor die Lam neergeval. Elkeen het 'n siter en 'n goue bak vol wierook vasgehou, dit is die gebede van die gelowiges. Toe sing hulle 'n nuwe lied met dié woorde:

“U is waardig genoeg om die boekrol te neem
en sy seëls te breek
omdat U geslag is
en met u bloed mense vir God vrygekoop het,
uit elke geslag en taalgroep,
volk en nasie.
U het hulle vir ons tot konings en priesters gemaak.”

Toe het ek gekyk en ek het die stemme gehoor van baie engele wat rondom die troon gestaan het, asook van die lewende wesens en ouderlinge. Hulle getal was tienduisende, eintlik miljoene der miljoene. Hulle het in 'n magtige koor gesing:

“Die Lam wat geslag is, is waardig genoeg
om die mag en rykdom, die wysheid en sterkte,
die eer, heerlikheid en lofprysing te ontvang.”

Die hele skepping – in die hemel, op die aarde en onder die aarde, op die see en alles wat in hulle bestaan, het ek hoor sê:

“Aan Hom wat op die troon sit en aan die Lam,
kom toe die lofprysing en die eerbetoning,
die heerlikheid en die krag
vir altyd en altyd.”

Die vier lewende wesens het gesê: “Amen!” En die ouderlinge het neergeval en Hom begin aanbid.

Van die troon se kant af het 'n stem opgeklank wat sê:

“Loof ons God,
al sy diensknegte,
dié wat Hom met ontsag bejeën,
klein en groot!”

Ek het toe iets gehoor soos die geluid van 'n baie groot skare, soos die gedruis van baie waterstrome en soos die gerammel van swaar donderweer. Hulle het aanhou uitroep:

“Halleluja!

Die Here heers as koning, ons God, die Almagtige,
laat ons juig en jubel
en aan Hom eer betoon,
want die tyd het aangebreek vir die bruilof van die Lam,
en sy bruid het haarself daarop voorberei.

Sy is toegelaat om fyn,
helder skoon linne aan te trek.”

Die fyn linneklere is die regverdige dade
van hulle wat aan God toegewy is.

Die engel het toe vir my gesê: “Skryf: Geseënd is hulle wat na die bruilofsfees van die Lam uitgenooi is.” Hy sê toe ook aan my: “Die woorde wat van God af kom, is betroubaar.”

Toe het ek voor sy voete neergeval om hom te aanbid. Hy sê egter vir my: “Oppas, moenie! Ek is net jou mededienskneg, en van al jou medegelowiges wat getuienis van hulle geloof in Jesus gelewer het. Buig neer in aanbidding voor God! Die kern van die profesie is inderdaad om van Jesus te getuig.”

Toe het ek gesien die hemel is oopgemaak. En kyk! Daar verskyn ’n wit perd. Sy Ruiter word die Getroue en Betroubare genoem. Hy oordeel op ’n regverdige manier en voer ook só oorlog. Sy oë was soos ’n vuurvlam, en op sy kop was daar baie heerserskrone. Op Hom was ’n Naam geskryf wat niemand anders as net Hyself geken het nie. Hy het klere aangehad wat in bloed gedoop is, en sy Naam was: Die Woord van God.

Die leërs van die hemel het Hom op wit perde gevolg. Hulle het fyn, helder wit klere aangehad. Uit sy mond het daar toe ’n skerp swaard gekom om die nasies mee te verslaan, en Hy sal hulle soos met ’n ysterstaf beheer. Hy sal self die parskuip vir die wyn trap, dit is die wyn van die toorn en woede van God, die Almagtige. Op sy kleed, by die heup, was ’n Naam geskryf:

“Koning van die konings en Here van die heersers.”

Kort nadat hierdie storie in die boek van Genesis begin het, het God se stryd teen die Bose duidelik geword in die Tuin van Eden. Hier aan die einde, sal die finale stryd begin. Wanneer dit verby is, sal die onderdrukking, onbillikheid en hartseer wat deur Satan se kant veroorsaak is, toegedraai en afgestuur word na ’n plek baie ver van God se huis af. Die hele wêreld se verwoesting en gebrokenheid sal

plek maak vir Jesus se belofte van 'n nuwe skepping, 'n nuwe omgewing, 'n nuwe stad van vrede en vryheid. Dit is hier waar Christene die heerlikheid en heiligheid van God self vir altyd sal geniet. Dit is baie goeie nuus vir God se kinders, maar dit sal 'n tyd van onuitspreeklike afgryse wees vir dié wat wegdraai van God.

Ek het toe 'n groot wit troon gesien en iemand wat daarop sit. Die aarde en die hemel het van Hom af weggevlug, en daar was nie meer wegkruipplek vir hulle oor nie. Ek het ook die dooies, groot en klein, voor die troon sien staan. Daarna is die boekrolle oopgemaak. Daar is ook 'n ander boekrol oopgemaak, dit is die Boekrol van die Lewe. Die dooies is geoordeel volgens wat opgeskryf staan oor wat hulle gedoen het. Die see het die dooies teruggegee wat daarin was, en die dood en die doderyk het die dooies teruggegee wat daarin was, en hulle is elkeen geoordeel volgens wat hulle gedoen het. Die dood en die doderyk is toe in die vuurpoel gegooi. Dit is die tweede dood – die poel van vuur. En as dit geblyk het dat iemand se naam nie in die Boekrol van die Lewe opgeskryf staan nie, is hy in die vuurpoel gegooi.

Toe het ek 'n nuwe hemel en 'n nuwe aarde gesien; want die eerste hemel en die eerste aarde het verbygegaan en die see het nie meer bestaan nie. Ek het ook die heilige stad, die nuwe Jerusalem, van God af uit die hemel sien neerkom. Die nuwe Jerusalem was soos 'n bruid wat vir haar eggenoot mooigemaak is.

Ek het toe 'n kragtige stem van die troon af hoor sê: “Kyk, die tentwoning van God is nou onder die mense opgeslaan. Hy sal by hulle bly, en hulle sal sy volke wees en God sal self by hulle wees as hulle God. Hy sal elke traan van hulle oë afvee en die dood sal glad nie meer bestaan nie. Ook hartseer of smartkrete of pyn sal glad nie meer bestaan nie. Die ou dinge het verbygegaan.”

Hy wat op die troon sit, het toe gesê: “Kyk, Ek maak alle dinge nuut.” En Hy sê verder: “Teken dit aan, want hierdie woorde is geloofwaardig en betroubaar.” Verder het Hy vir my gesê: “Dit is afgehandel. Ek is die Alfa en die Omega, die Begin en die Einde. Iemand wat dors het, sal Ek verniet laat drink uit die fontein met lewegewende water. Die een wat aanhou oorwin, sal hierdie dinge erf, en Ek sal vir hom God wees en hy sal vir My 'n kind wees.

“Maar vir die oneerlikes, onbetroubares, korruptes, moordenaars, persone wat seksuele sondes doen, towenaars, afgodsdienaars en al die leuenaars wag die poel wat met vuur en swael brand. Dit is die tweede dood.”

Toe het een van die sewe engele wat die sewe bakke vashou wat vol was met die laaste sewe plae, nadergestaan en aan my gesê: “Kom, ek sal jou die bruid wys, die vrou van die Lam.”

Hy het my toe in die Gees na ’n groot en hoë berg geneem en die heilige stad Jerusalem, wat van God af uit die hemel afgekom het, aan my gewys. Die stad was gevul met die heerlikheid van God. Dit het gestraal, net soos ’n baie kosbare steen, soos ’n kristal helder jaspis.

Die stad het ook ’n groot en hoë muur gehad waarin twaalf poorte was. By die poorte is daar twaalf engele, met twaalf name op die poorte gegraveer; dit is die name van die twaalf stamme van Israel. Aan die oostekant is daar drie poorte, aan die noordekant drie, aan die suidekant drie en aan die westekant drie. Die stadsmuur het twaalf fondamentstene waarop die twaalf name van die twaalf apostels van die Lam geskryf staan.

Die engel wat met my in gesprek was, het ’n goue liniaal vasgehou. Die doel was om daarmee die stad self, sy poorte en sy muur te meet. Die stad is vierkantig uitgelê, sy lengte dieselfde as sy breedte. Hy het toe die stad met die meetstok gemeet. Die lengte, die breedte en ook die hoogte daarvan is dieselfde – 12 000 *stadia*. Hy het ook die muur van die stad gemeet. Dit is 144 el hoog. (Die engel het volgens ’n aardse maat gemeet.)

Die boumateriaal van die muur is jaspis en dié van die stad self suiwer goud, so helder soos skoon glas.

Die fondamentstene van die stadsmuur is met elke soort edelsteen versier: die eerste fondamentsteen met jaspis, die tweede met saffier, die derde met agaath, die vierde met smarag, die vyfde met sardoniks, die sesde met karneool, die sewende met chrisoliet, die agtste met berilsteen, die negende met topaas, die tiende met chrisopraas, die elfde met hiasint, en die twaalfde met ametis. Die twaalf poorte is van twaalf pêrels gemaak. Elkeen van die poorte is uit een pêrel gemaak. Die strate van die stad is van suiwer goud, so helder soos deurskynende glas.

Ek het nie ’n tempel in die stad gesien nie, want die Here God, die Almagtige, en die Lam is sy tempel. Die stad het ook nie die son en die maan nodig om dit te verlig nie, want die heerlikheid van God het dit verlig, en die Lam is sy kandelaar. Die nasies sal in die stad se lig lewe en die konings van die aarde bring hulle luister daarheen. Die poorte van die stad sal bedags nooit gesluit word nie, en daar sal nie meer nag wees nie. Die nasies sal hulle luister en eerbetoen na die stad toe bring. Niks wat besoedel is en niemand wat gruwelik en vals optree,

sal ooit hulle voete in die stad sit nie, slegs dié wat opgeskryf is in die Boekrol van die Lewe, dit is die Boekrol van die Lam.

Toe het die engel aan my die rivier met lewegewende water gewys. Dit is helder soos kristal en vloei vanaf die troon van God en van die Lam. Tussen die hoofstraat van die stad aan die een kant en die rivier aan die ander kant staan die boom van die lewe. Dit dra twaalf keer per jaar vrug; elke maand dra hy sy vrugte. En die blare van dié boom gee genesing aan die nasies.

Geen vervloeking van enigiets sal langer meer bestaan nie. Die troon van God en van die Lam sal in die stad staan en sy diensknegte sal Hom dien. Hulle sal Hom vol in die oë kyk, en sy Naam sal op hulle voorkoppe wees. Daar sal ook geen behoefte aan die lig van 'n kandelaar of van die son wees nie omdat die Here God vir hulle lig sal gee, en hulle sal vir altyd as konings regeer.

Die engel het toe aan my gesê: “Hierdie woorde is geloofwaardig en betroubaar. Die Here God wat sy Gees aan die profete gegee het, het sy engel gestuur om aan sy diensknegte te wys wat binnekort moet gebeur.”

Jesus sê toe: “Kyk, Ek kom gou! Geseënd is elkeen wat die profetiese woorde in hierdie boekrol gehoorsaam.”

Ek, Johannes, het hierdie dinge gehoor en gesien. En toe ek dit gehoor en gesien het, het ek in aanbidding neergeval voor die voete van die engel wat al hierdie dinge aan my uitgewys het. Maar hy sê aan my: “Oppas, moenie! Ek is maar net 'n mededienskneg van jou en van jou medegelowiges, naamlik die profete, en van dié wat die woorde van hierdie boekrol gehoorsaam. Aanbid God!”

Hy het toe aan my 'n opdrag gegee: “Moenie die woorde van hierdie profetiese boekrol verseël nie, want die eindtyd is naby. Wie aanhou om kwaad te doen, moet nog meer kwaad doen en wie vuil is, moet vuil bly, maar wie reg optree, moet voortgaan om reg te doen, en wie aan God toegewy is, moet ook verder aan God toegewy bly.”

Jesus sê: “Kyk, Ek kom gou! My loon kom saam met My om almal te beloon volgens wat hulle gedoen het. Ek is die Alfa en die Omega, die Eerste en die Laaste, die Begin en die Einde.”

Geseënd is dié wat hulle klere skoon was sodat hulle aanspraak mag hê op die boom van die lewe, en mag ingaan deur die poorte van die stad. Al die onreines bly buite – die towenaars, dié wat seksuele sondes doen, die moordenaars, die afgodsdienaars en elkeen wat die leuen liefhet en lieg.

“Ek, Jesus, het my engel gestuur om al die dinge aan julle in die

gemeentes te verkondig. Ek is die Wortel, die Nakomeling van Dawid, die helder Môrester.”

Die Gees en die bruid sê toe: “Kom!” En elkeen wat dit hoor, moet sê: “Kom!” En elkeen wat dors het, moet kom; elkeen wat smag na die lewegewende water, moet kom haal, verniet!

Ek getuig plegtig teenoor elkeen wat die woorde van hierdie profetiese boekrol hoor: As iemand iets hieraan byvoeg, sal God vir hom as straf die plaë byvoeg waarvan in hierdie boekrol geskryf is, en as iemand een van die woorde van hierdie profetiese boekrol wegneem, sal God sy deel wegneem aan die boom van die lewe en aan die heilige stad waarvan in hierdie boekrol geskryf is.

Hy wat hierdie dinge getuig, sê: “Ja, Ek kom gou!”

Amen! Kom, Here Jesus!

Mag die genade van die Here Jesus met julle almal wees.

Epilogue

THE STORY HAS COME TO AN END, and God's message rings loud and clear:

I have opened the door; I have made a way — come to me and have life!

The Good News has gone out to the world. Jesus has come to provide salvation for us all! All of God's story has led up to this ultimate news that we can experience and share with others. It has survived for thousands of years, marching forth to all cultures and peoples, leaving behind an incredible wake of transformation and change. Many have tried to put out its fire, but God's words have proven to be true, "My word ... will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

And now God's triumphant Word has found its way to you. You've read *The Story*. You've heard the truth. You've come face to face with the most important message you will ever hear: Jesus, God's Son, came, lived, died and rose again.

So now the question remains ...

What will *you* do with *The Story*?

Will you turn away and dismiss it as an interesting tale? Will you block out the light that shines so brightly? Or will you take a step down the narrow path that leads to unimaginable glory? Jesus tells us, "Enter through the narrow gate ... small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Will you be one of the few?

The chapter bearing your name is about to be written.

Epiloog

Die storie het sy einde bereik, en God se boodskap is hard en duidelik:

Ek het die deur oopgemaak; Ek het die weg voorberei – kom na My toe en ervaar lewe!

Die Goeie Nuus is in die wêreld verkondig. Jesus het gekom om redding vir ons almal te voorsien. God se hele storie het opgebou na die uiteindelijke nuus wat ons kan ervaar en met ander mense kan deel. Dit het vir duisende jare oorleef, na alle kulture en mense versprei en ongelooflike transformasie en verandering tot gevolg gehad. Baie het die vuur probeer blus, maar God se woorde is waar bewys: “Die woord sal nie leeg na My toe terugkeer nie, maar dit sal doen wat Ek verwag en die doel bereik waarvoor Ek dit gestuur het.”

En nou het God se triomferende Woord sy weg na jou gevind. Jy het *Die storie* gelees. Jy het die waarheid gehoor. Jy het van aangesig tot aangesig gekom met die belangrikste storie wat jy ooit sal hoor: Jesus, God se Seun, het gekom, gelewe, gesterf en uit die dood opgestaan.

Nou bly daar net een vraag oor ...

Wat gaan jý met *Die storie* doen?

Gaan jy wegdraai en dit afmaak as 'n interessante verhaal? Gaan jy die lig wat so helder skyn, probeer keer? Of gaan jy 'n tree gee op die smal paadjie wat na ondenkbare heerlikheid lei? Jesus sê vir ons: “Gaan die koninkryk deur die nou poort binne. Hoe nou is die poort, en hoe smal is die pad na die lewe nie! Min is die mense wat dit kry!” Sal jy een van die min wees?

Die hoofstuk met jou naam op gaan nou geskryf word.

Discussion Questions

1 Creation: The Beginning of Life as We Know It

1. In what ways was life in the original creation different from life as we know it today?
2. Why did God create humans in his own image? What does this mean?
3. What was the root cause of Adam and Eve's sin against God?
4. Why did God put the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil in the garden?

5. Why did God bring the flood upon the earth?
6. What does this act of judgment tell you about God?

2 God Builds a Nation

1. Abraham left his homeland and family to follow God. What did God say his reward would be?
2. What might God be asking you to give up to follow him?
3. What made Abraham righteous in God's sight? How is this fact relevant to your life?
4. Why did God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac? What did Abraham — and Isaac — learn from this experience?
5. Because Jacob had shrewdly acquired Esau's birthright and stolen their father's blessing, Jacob feared his brother's revenge. How did Jacob prepare for his meeting with Esau?
6. What attitude did Jacob have when he wrestled with the "man" who Jacob eventually realized was actually God?

3 Joseph: From Slave to Deputy Pharaoh

1. Why did Joseph's brothers want to get rid of him?
2. Why does God allow hurtful things to happen to people?
3. What were the positive effects of Joseph's being sold into slavery?
4. What does Joseph's statement to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good," tell you about God?
5. In what ways have you seen God work through the most bleak and hopeless situations to cause a greater good?
6. Why can God be trusted at all times?

4 Deliverance

1. What was significant about Moses' birth?
2. How did God display his concern and love for his people after hearing their cries and groaning?
3. In what ways was Moses qualified to lead the people? In what ways did he feel he was not qualified?
4. Have you ever felt unqualified or unable to do something, as Moses did? How did you handle it?
5. *The Story* notes several amazing miracles in the deliverance of the people from Egypt. Do you believe God performs miracles today? Why or why not?
6. What can you learn about the character of God from the story of the Israelites' deliverance from slavery?

5 New Commands and a New Covenant

1. How were the people to prepare themselves to meet with God?
2. What does this story of the giving of these new commands tell you about the character of God?
3. What was the purpose of the Ten Commandments?
4. How can God be both the merciful forgiver of sin and the punisher of the guilty?
5. The Israelites became impatient and finally made a golden idol in the shape of a calf for themselves. What are some false gods/idols worshiped in our society today?
6. The Lord spoke to Moses "as one speaks to a friend." What steps can you take to gain a deeper understanding of who God is?

6 Wandering

1. What do you think was the root cause of most of the Israelites' problems? Why?
2. How did God respond to the people's lack of faith?
3. Why is God so radically opposed to sin?
4. What do you learn from Moses' leadership throughout this difficult period? How did he display frustration and faith?
5. Have you ever felt as if you were "wandering in the wilderness" — spiritually or emotionally? Explain.
6. How can having faith in what God has promised help you in difficult times?

7 The Battle Begins

1. How could Joshua be "strong and courageous" in such intimidating situations?
2. What do you learn about God from the story of the salvation of Rahab the prostitute?
3. What do the string of amazing battle victories the people experienced as they entered the land reveal about who is really in charge of history?
4. Why did God order the Israelites to go to war against others? How was this war justified?
5. How did Joshua challenge the people in his final speech?
6. Why do you think God lavished blessings on Joshua and all the Israelites, who, like Joshua, trusted God?
7. What practical steps can you take to gain a deeper faith in God?

8 A Few Good Men ... and Women

1. What does God's choice of Deborah as judge during this time reveal about God's view of women?

2. Why does God often use weak and uncertain people like Gideon to do his work?
3. If you ever feel uncertain about your gifts and abilities, how could the story of Gideon encourage and strengthen you?
4. What reasons can you give for why the Israelites kept repeating their downward cycle of sin?
5. What was the root cause of Samson's fall? What was the result?
6. What are the strongest temptations that you face? How do you fight such temptations?

9 The Faith of a Foreign Woman

1. What does Ruth's story reveal about the love of God?
2. What does Ruth's story reveal about how God views all people groups? What does that mean for you?
3. Both Ruth and Naomi suffered tremendous loss. Why does a good and gracious God allow tragedy to come upon those who love him?
4. When difficult times come, what causes you to continue to hope in God?
5. Ruth left her home to follow Naomi and to follow God. How is God asking you to follow him?
6. In what way do Ruth's actions and responses challenge you? Encourage you?
7. What steps can you take to become a more selfless, loving person?

10 Standing Tall, Falling Hard

1. What do you learn about prayer from Hannah?

2. How did Samuel show his faith in God?
3. Why was it wrong for the Israelites to ask for a king?
4. What factors led to King Saul's demise?
5. How did Saul respond when confronted with his sin? How do you respond when confronted with your own shortcomings?
6. What instances of God's grace do you see in this chapter?

11 From Shepherd to King

1. Why was David chosen to be the next king of Israel?
2. What obstacles did David face to become the king he was anointed to be?
3. How was David able to face a giant when so many others gave way to fear?
4. Why did David spare Saul when he had the chance to be free of Saul's attempts to kill him? What would you have done?
5. David had a single goal (that the God of Israel would be glorified) because he had a single love (the God of Israel). What can you do to cultivate a heart like David's?

12 The Trials of a King

1. What were some factors that led to David's sin with Bathsheba?
2. Both Saul and David sinned against God, yet how did their responses differ? What was the result of their responses?
3. How did David's sins affect the future of his family?
4. David was allowed to plan the temple, but God told him that his son would be the one to actually build it. How do think David felt about that? How did David respond?

5. Do you, like David, give God credit and praise for your successes and accomplishments?

13 The King Who Had It All

1. Why was Solomon's request for wisdom and discernment so pleasing to the Lord?
2. How is wisdom different from mere knowledge and intellect?
3. Why is it vital to become wise?
4. What can you do to gain more wisdom?
5. How did pride and lust contribute to Solomon's fall?
6. What can you do to guard yourself against these sins?

14 A Kingdom Torn in Two

1. What caused the kingdom of Israel to be divided?
2. How did Rehoboam and Jeroboam both make mistakes?
3. What observations do you make about God's character and what is important to God, based on this chapter?
4. Why is it important to always remain loyal to God?
5. When have you strayed from God? What caused the straying?
6. In what ways has God been kind to you even when you didn't deserve it?

15 God's Messengers

1. What do you learn about faith from Elijah's ups (victory over the prophets of Baal) and his downs (depression in the desert)?
2. God revealed himself to Elijah in a gentle whisper. What

does this tell you about God's character and methods of communication?

3. What steps can you take to hear the gentle whisper of God?
4. In what ways did the prophet Elisha live a life of faith?
5. Identify the ways God was faithful to Elisha.
6. How has God been faithful to you?
7. What specific message of social justice and spiritual faithfulness do you think the prophets Amos and Hosea would proclaim today?

16 The Beginning of the End (of the Kingdom of Israel)

1. Why did Hezekiah experience so many difficulties? Does obedience to God guarantee prosperity?
2. When Hezekiah received an intimidating letter from his enemies, he "went up to the temple of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD." When have you reacted to an attack or urgent problem with a similar attitude?
3. What were some of the main themes in Isaiah's prophecies?
4. How could God be merciful to his people in light of their actions toward him?
5. How has God shown mercy to you?
6. Isaiah foretold the rise and fall of nations. Is God still in control of world events in our day?

17 The Kingdoms' Fall

1. Why did disaster come upon God's people?
2. What negative effects of sin have you seen in your life?
3. What were some of the main themes of the prophets' messages during this time?

4. Can you relate to Jeremiah as the “weeping prophet” who felt deeply the burden of God’s people’s sin?
5. How does God’s promise of restoration for his people still give you hope today?

18 Daniel in Exile

1. In what ways do you see Daniel exhibit his faith in God?
2. What enabled Daniel’s three friends to stand against the king’s orders?
3. Why did God choose to punish Nebuchadnezzar the way that he did? What was the result of this punishment?
4. Why did Daniel prosper under the kings of Babylon and Persia?
5. What can you learn about prayer from Daniel?
6. What steps can you take to become more devoted to prayer?

19 The Return Home

1. Why did God rescue the Israelites again?
2. In what ways have you seen or experienced the rescuing power of God?
3. What did the Israelites do to deserve the mercy they received?
4. What reason does God have for being merciful to you?
5. The Jews returned home to rebuild the temple, the dwelling place of God on earth. Why was it important for them to do this?
6. Where does God dwell on earth today?

20 The Queen of Beauty and Courage

1. What does this chapter of *The Story* teach about God's work behind the scenes of history?
2. How did Mordecai respond when faced with disaster?
3. What character qualities do you observe in Queen Esther?
4. When was the last time you faced a threatening situation? What was your reaction?
5. In what ways have you experienced God's faithfulness in your life?
6. What steps can you take to show that you trust in the faithfulness of God?

21 Rebuilding the Walls

1. What was Ezra's role when he arrived in Jerusalem?
2. In what ways do you see God's faithfulness in this chapter?
3. Why was Nehemiah able to rebuild the city walls amidst such severe opposition?
4. What can you do to gain a greater dependence on God in difficult circumstances?
5. According to the prophet Malachi, what did the Israelites do (or not do) that displeased the Lord? Why were these things so evil?
6. Are there areas of your life displeasing to the Lord? What can you do to make your relationship right again?

22 The Birth of the King

1. Why did God send Jesus into the world?
2. What can you learn from Mary's reaction to her surprising and somewhat disturbing news?
3. Why was Jesus born into such humble circumstances?

4. What does this chapter reveal about who Jesus is?
5. What impact has the birth of Christ had on your life?
6. Why should you be thankful that God sent his Son into the world?

23 Jesus' Ministry Begins

1. What purposes did Jesus' baptism and temptation serve?
2. How would you sum up the main message that Jesus had for the people?
3. Why did so many people have a deep hatred for Jesus?
4. Jesus said that we must be "born again" to enter the kingdom of God. What does it mean to be born again?
5. What kind of people did Jesus typically reach out to? What kind of people did he oppose? Why?
6. Jesus stated that "whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." What do you think this statement means?

24 No Ordinary Man

1. Why might Jesus have used parables as a way to teach people?
2. What can you learn from Jesus' parables that you can use in your own life?
3. If you would have heard Jesus' sermon, what do you think you would have done? Would you have followed him?
4. Why did Jesus' teaching bother some of the religious leaders?
5. Jesus explained that he is the "bread of life" — the source of sustenance and satisfaction. What can you do to gain a

deeper satisfaction in your relationship with Jesus?

25 Jesus, the Son of God

1. How would you respond to someone who asked, “Who is Jesus?”
2. What was Jesus’ primary mission during his life?
3. What character qualities do you see in Jesus?
4. What changes do you need to make to bring your life into conformity with Jesus’ values and priorities?
5. In what ways did Jesus’ words and actions reveal the fact that he is equal with God?
6. How would you respond to the question, “How can you be sure that Jesus is God?”
7. What can you do to gain a deeper love for Jesus? Why is this important?

26 The Hour of Darkness

1. What did Jesus predict at the last supper with his disciples?
2. Why did Jesus have to die?
3. How did Jesus’ followers respond to the tragic events?
4. What implications does Jesus’ death on the cross for the sins of humanity have for your life?
5. What can you learn about God’s love through these events?
6. In what way has Jesus’ life and death affected the way you live your life from day to day?

27 The Resurrection

1. After Jesus died, why did some of his followers come to the tomb? What does this tell you about friendship and loyalty

among Jesus' companions?

2. Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead? Why?
3. When Jesus appeared to people after his resurrection, how do you think their lives were changed?
4. What does Jesus' resurrection from the dead reveal about God's power over death and sin?
5. What difference can or does it make in your life knowing that Jesus is alive today?
6. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he commanded his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations." If you are a believer, when was the last time you talked to someone else about your faith in Jesus?

28 New Beginnings

1. Why was Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost so effective?
2. Why did the Jewish religious leaders dislike the early Christians?
3. What examples of Christian love and fellowship do you see in this chapter?
4. What factors helped the Good News of Jesus Christ to spread quickly?
5. How were the early Christians able to remain faithful even in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances?
6. What practical steps can you take to increase your faith?
7. How do you explain the drastic change in Saul's (Paul's) life?

29 Paul's Mission

1. After Paul found the Lord, what was Paul's passion and

mission in life?

2. What is your passion and mission in life?
3. When in a new city, why did Paul invariably begin his outreach at the Jewish synagogue?
4. How would you define “the gospel”?
5. What impact does the gospel have on your life?
6. What would have happened to Christianity if the Jewish believers who insisted that Gentiles become Jews prevailed?
7. What does Paul’s letter to the Romans reveal to us about salvation?

30 Paul’s Final Days

1. How was Paul able to endure the pain and trials that he suffered for his beliefs?
2. What can you learn from Paul’s life about how to face difficult circumstances?
3. Why was Paul willing to walk into the face of danger?
4. What character qualities do you see in Paul?
5. What practical steps can you take to cultivate character qualities that resemble Paul’s?
6. How would you sum up Paul’s message?

31 The End of Time

1. What was John’s response when he saw Jesus in the vision? Why did he respond this way?
2. What were the warnings Jesus gave to the churches? In what way do these warnings apply to your life?

3. What do you learn about God from his actions and descriptions in this chapter?
4. What does this chapter reveal about what heaven will be like?
5. Why is it important to think about and set your hope on heaven?
6. What steps can you take to set your hope more fully on what you know about eternity from this chapter?

Besprekingsvrae

1. Die skepping: Die begin van lewe soos ons dit ken

1. Hoe het die lewe in die oorspronklike skepping verskil van die lewe soos ons dit vandag ken?
2. Hoekom het God die mens na sy beeld geskep? Wat beteken dit?
3. Wat was die werklike rede vir Adam en Eva se sonde teen God?
4. Hoekom het God die boom van kennis van reg en verkeerd in die tuin gesit?
5. Hoekom het God die vloed op die aarde veroorsaak?
6. Wat vertel hierdie handeling van oordeel vir ons van God?

2. God bou 'n nasie

1. Abraham het sy tuisland en familie verlaat om God te volg. Wat het God gesê sal sy beloning wees?
2. Wat vra God dalk van jou om op te gee sodat jy Hom kan volg?
3. Wat het Abraham geregtig gemaak in God se oë? Hoe is hierdie feit van toepassing op jou lewe?
4. Hoekom het God vir Abraham gevra om sy seun Isak te offer? Wat het Abraham – en Isak – uit hierdie

ervaring geleer?

5. Omdat Jakob Esau se geboortereg op slinkse wyse bekom het en sy pa se seën gesteel het, was Jakob bang vir sy broer se wraak. Hoe het Jakob voorberei vir sy ontmoeting met Esau?
6. Wat was Jakob se houding terwyl hy met die “man” gestoei het wat Jakob uiteindelik besef het God is?

3. Josef: Van slaaf tot onderkoning

1. Hoekom wou Josef se broers van hom ontslae raak?
2. Waarom laat God toe dat daar slegte dinge met mense gebeur?
3. Watter was die positiewe gevolge nadat Josef in slawerny verkoop is?
4. Wat sê Josef se stelling aan sy broers “Julle het my wel kwaad aangedoen, maar God het die kwaad wat julle gedoen het, omgekeer in iets wat goed is” vir jou oor God?
5. Op watter maniere het jy al vir God sien werk in die hopeloosste situasie om iets goeds tot gevolg te hê?
6. Hoekom kan God te alle tye vertrou word?

4. Bevryding

1. Wat was betekenisvol aan Moses se geboorte?
2. Hoe het God sy bekommernis en liefde vir sy mense gewys nadat hy hulle uitroepe en kreune gehoor het?
3. Wat het Moses bekwaam gemaak om die mense te lei? Op watter maniere het hy gevoel hy is nie bekwaam nie?
4. Het jy al ooit onbekwaam of onbevoeg gevoel om iets te doen, soos Moses? Hoe het jy dit hanteer?
5. *Die storie* noem verskeie fantastiese wonderwerke in die bevryding van die mense uit Egipte. Glo jy God doen vandag nog wonderwerke? Hoekom of hoekom nie?
6. Wat kan jy oor God se karakter leer uit die storie oor die Israeliete se bevryding van slawerny?

5. Nuwe wette en ’n nuwe verbond

1. Hoe moes die mense hulle voorberei om vir God te

ontmoet?

2. Wat vertel hierdie storie oor die gee van nuwe wette vir jou oor die karakter van God?
3. Wat was die doel van die Tien Gebooie?
4. Hoe kan God ons sondes in genade vergewe én die Een wees wat ons straf vir ons sondes?
5. Die Israeliete het ongeduldig geword en uiteindelik 'n goue afgod in die vorm van 'n kalf vir hulleself gemaak. Wat is sommige vals gode/afgode wat in ons gemeenskap aanbid word?
6. Die Here het met Moses gepraat soos met 'n vriend. Watter stappe kan jy doen om 'n beter begrip te kry van wie God is?

6. Omswerwinge

1. Wat dink jy was die grondoorsaak van die meeste van die Israeliete se probleme? Hoekom?
2. Hoe het God gereageer op die mense se gebrek aan geloof?
3. Hoekom is God so radikaal gekant teen sonde?
4. Wat leer jy oor Moses se leierskap gedurende hierdie moeilike periode? Hoe het hy sy frustrasie en geloof gewys?
5. Het dit al ooit vir jou gevoel of jy in die woestyn wandel – geestelik of emosioneel? Verduidelik.
6. Hoe kan om geloof in God se beloftes te hê jou help in moeilike tye?

7. Die stryd begin

1. Hoe kon Josua sterk en standvastig wees in sulke intimiderende situasies?
2. Wat leer jy oor God uit die storie oor Ragab die prostituut se verlossing?
3. Wat het die string wonderlike oorwinnings wat die mense ervaar het terwyl hulle die land binnegegaan het, gewys oor wie werklik in beheer van die geskiedenis is?
4. Hoekom het God die Israeliete beveel oor oorlog te voer teen ander? Hoe was die oorlog geregverdig?
5. Hoe het Josua die mense in sy laaste toespraak uitgedaag?

6. Hoekom dink jy het God vir Josua en die ander Israeliete wat, soos Josua, op God vertrou het met seëninge oorlaai?
7. Watter praktiese stappe kan jy doen om 'n dieper geloof in God te kry?

8. 'n Klompie goeie mans ... en vroue

1. Wat wys God se keuse van Debora as 'n rigter in hierdie tyd vir jou oor God se siening oor vroue?
2. Hoekom gebruik God dikwels swak en onseker mense soos Gideon om sy werk te doen?
3. As jy ooit onseker voel oor jou gawes en vermoëns, hoe kan die storie van Gideon jou bemoedig en versterk?
4. Watter redes kan jy gee oor hoekom die Israeliete hulle afwaartse siklus van sonde herhaal?
5. Wat was die grondoorsaak van Simson se val? Wat was die gevolg?
6. Wat is die grootste versoekings waarvoor jy al te staan gekom het? Hoe beveg jy sulke versoekings?

9. Die geloof van 'n heidense vrou

1. Wat wys Rut se storie oor God se liefde?
2. Wat wys Rut se storie oor God se siening van alle mense? Wat beteken dit vir jou?
3. Beide Rut en Naomi het geweldige verliese ervaar. Hoekom laat 'n goeie en genadige God toe dat mense wat Hom liefhet swaarkry?
4. Wat laat jou steeds op God vertrou wanneer moeilike tye kom?
5. Rut het haar huis verlaat om vir Naomi en vir God te volg. Hoe vra God jou om Hom te volg?
6. Op watter maniere daag Rut se optrede en reaksies jou uit? Bemoedig dit jou?
7. Watter stappe kan jy doen om 'n meer selflose, liefdevolle persoon te wees?

10. Staan sterk, val hard

1. Wat leer jy van gebed by Hanna?
2. Hoe het Samuel sy geloof in God gewys?
3. Hoekom was dit verkeerd van die Israeliete om vir

'n koning te vra?

4. Watter faktore het bygedra tot koning Saul se val?
5. Hoe het Saul gereageer toe hy met sy sonde gekonfronteer is? Hoe reageer jy wanneer jy met jou tekortkomings gekonfronteer word?
6. Watter voorbeelde van God se genade sien jy in hierdie hoofstuk?

11. Van skaapwagter tot koning

1. Hoekom is Dawid gekies as die volgende koning van Israel?
2. Voor watter hindernisse het Dawid te staan gekom in sy pad tot koningskap nadat hy gesalf is?
3. Hoe het Dawid dit reggekry om 'n reus te konfronteer terwyl baie ander van vrees weggekrimp het?
4. Hoekom het Dawid Saul se lewe gespaar toe hy die kans gehad het om te ontsnap van Saul se moordpogings? Wat sou jy gedoen het?
5. Dawid het net een doel gehad (dat die God van Israel verheerlik moet word) omdat hy net een liefde gehad het (die God van Israel). Wat kan jy doen om 'n hart soos Dawid te ontwikkel?

12. Die beproewings van 'n koning

1. Wat was sommige van die faktore wat gelei het tot Dawid se sonde met Batseba?
2. Beide Saul en Dawid het teen God gesondig, hoe het hulle reaksies egter verskil? Wat was die gevolge van hulle reaksies?
3. Hoe het Dawid se sondes sy familie se toekoms geraak?
4. Dawid is toegelaat om die tempel te beplan, maar God het vir hom gesê dat sy seun dit sal bou. Hoe dink jy het Dawid hieroor gevoel? Hoe het Dawid gereageer?
5. Gee jy, soos Dawid, vir God die eer vir jou suksesse?

13. Die koning wat alles gehad het

1. Hoekom was God so tevrede met Salomo se versoek om wysheid en onderskeidingsvermoë?

2. Hoe verskil wysheid van blote kennis en intellek?
3. Hoekom is dit belangrik om wys te word?
4. Wat kan jy doen om wyser te word?
5. Hoe het trots en wellus bygedra tot Salomo se ondergang?
6. Wat kan jy doen om jouself teen hierdie sondes te beskerm?

14. 'n Koninkryk in twee geskeur

1. Wat het veroorsaak dat die koninkryk van Israel in twee verdeel het?
2. Hoe het Rehabeam en Jerobeam albei foute gemaak?
3. As jy na hierdie hoofstuk kyk, watter waarnemings maak jy oor God se karakter en wat vir Hom belangrik is?
4. Hoekom is dit belangrik om altyd getrou te bly aan God?
5. Wanneer het jy weggedwaal van God? Wat was die oorsaak?
6. Op watter maniere was God goed vir jou selfs al het jy dit nie verdien nie?

15. God se boodskappers

1. Wat leer jy oor geloof uit Elia se goeie (oorwinning oor die Baälprofete) en sy slegte (depressie in die woestyn) tye?
2. God het Homself in 'n sagte fluistering aan Elia geopenbaar. Wat sê dit vir jou van God se karakter en kommunikasiemetodes?
3. Wat kan jy doen om God se sagte fluistering te hoor?
4. Op watter maniere het die profeet Elia 'n lewe van geloof geleef?
5. Identifiseer die wyses waarop God getrou was aan Elia.
6. Hoe was God getrou aan jou?
7. Watter spesifieke boodskappe van sosiale geregtigheid en geestelike getrouheid dink jy sou die profete Amos en Hosea vandag verkondig?

16. Die begin van die einde (van die koninkryk van Israel)

1. Hoekom het Hiskia soveel probleme ervaar? Waarborg gehoorsaamheid aan God voorspoed?
2. Toe Hiskia 'n intimiderende brief van sy vyande ontvang het, het hy opgegaan na die tempel van die Here en dit voor die Here oopgesprei. Wanneer het jy op soortgelyke wyse opgetree tydens 'n aanval of dringende probleem?
3. Wat was sommige van die hoofemas in Jesaja se profesieë?
4. Hoe kon God teen die agtergrond van sy mense se gedrag teenoor Hom so genadig wees teenoor hulle?
5. Hoe het God genade aan jou betoon?
6. Jesaja het vertel van die opkoms en val van nasies. Is God vandag nog in beheer van wêreldgebeure?

17. Die koninkryke kom tot 'n val

1. Hoekom het rampe God se mense getref?
2. Watter negatiewe gevolge van sonde het jy in jou lewe gesien?
3. Wat was sommige van die hoofemas in die profete se boodskappe gedurende hierdie tyd?
4. Kan jy assosieer met Jeremia as die “huilende profeet” wat die swaar las gevoel het van God se mense se sonde?
5. Hoe vervul God se belofte van herstel vir sy mense jou vandag nog met hoop?

18. Daniël in ballingskap

1. Op watter maniere openbaar Daniël sy geloof in God?
2. Wat het Daniël se drie vriende in staat gestel om op te staan teen die koning se opdragte?
3. Hoekom het God gekies om Nebukadnesar te straf op die manier wat Hy gekies het? Wat was die resultaat van die straf?
4. Hoekom was Daniël voorspoedig onder die konings van Babilon en Persië?
5. Wat kan jy by Daniël leer van gebed?
6. Watter stappe kan jy neem om meer toegewyd te wees in gebed?

19. Die terugkeer huis toe

1. Hoekom het God die Israeliete weer gered?
2. Op watter maniere het jy die reddende krag van God al gesien en ervaar?
3. Wat het die Israeliete gedoen om die genade te verdien wat hulle gekry het?
4. Waarom is God so genadig teenoor jou?
5. Die Jode het teruggekeer huis toe om die tempel, God se woonplek op aarde, te herbou. Hoekom was dit vir hulle belangrik om dit te doen?
6. Waar bly God vandag op aarde?

20. 'n Koningin met skoonheid en moed

1. Wat leer hierdie hoofstuk van *Die storie* ons oor God se werk agter die skerms van die geskiedenis?
2. Hoe het Mordegai gereageer toe hy met 'n ramp gekonfronteer is?
3. Watter karaktereienskappe sien jy by koningin Ester raak?
4. Wanneer laas het jy te staan gekom voor 'n bedreigende situasie? Hoe het jy gereageer?
5. Op watter maniere het jy God se getrouheid in jou lewe ervaar?
6. Wat kan jy doen om te wys dat jy vertrou in God se getrouheid?

21. Herbou die mure

1. Wat was Esra se rol toe hy in Jerusalem aangekom het?
2. Op watter maniere sien jy God se getrouheid in hierdie hoofstuk?
3. Hoe was Nehemia in staat om die mure te herbou onder sulke geweldige teenstand?
4. Wat kan jy doen om meer afhanklik te wees van God tydens moeilike omstandighede?
5. Wat het die Israeliete volgens die profeet Maleagi gedoen (of nie gedoen nie) om God kwaad te maak? Hoekom was hierdie dinge boos?
6. Is daar areas in jou lewe waarmee God ontevrede is? Wat kan jy doen om julle verhouding te herstel?

22. Die geboorte van die Koning

1. Hoekom het God vir Jesus na die aarde toe gestuur?
2. Wat kan jy leer uit Maria se reaksie op haar verrassende maar ontstellende nuus?
3. Hoekom is Jesus in sulke nederige omstandighede gebore?
4. Wat openbaar hierdie hoofstuk oor wie Jesus is?
5. Watter impak het Jesus se geboorte op jou lewe gehad?
6. Hoekom moet jy dankbaar wees dat God sy Seun na die wêreld toe gestuur het?

23. Jesus se bediening begin

1. Watter doel het Jesus se doop en versoekings gehad?
2. Hoe sal jy Jesus se hoofboodskap vir die mense opsom?
3. Hoekom het so baie mense Jesus gehaat?
4. Jesus het gesê ons moet weergebore word voordat ons die koninkryk van God kan binnegaan. Wat beteken dit om weergebore te word?
5. Na watter tipe mense het Jesus gewoonlik uitgereik? Watter tipe mense het Hy teengestaan? Hoekom?
6. Jesus het gesê: “Elkeen wat van hierdie water drink, sal weer dors word. Wie egter van die water drink wat Ek hom gee, sal nimmer as te nooit weer dors word nie. Die water wat Ek vir hom sal gee, sal ’n fontein in hom word waarvan die water vir altyd sal bly opborrel.” Wat dink jy beteken hierdie stelling?

24. Nie ’n gewone man nie

1. Hoekom het Jesus gelykenisse gebruik om die mense te leer?
2. Wat kan jy uit Jesus se gelykenisse leer wat jy in jou eie lewe kan gebruik?
3. As jy Jesus se preek gehoor het, wat dink jy sou jy gedoen het? Sou jy Hom gevolg het?
4. Hoekom het Jesus se leringe sommige godsdienstige leiers gepla?
5. Jesus het verduidelik dat Hy die “Brood van die lewe” is – die bron van kos en tevredenheid. Wat kan jy doen om groter tevredenheid te ervaar in jou

25. Jesus, die Seun van God

1. Hoe sou jy reageer as iemand vra: “Wie is Jesus”?
2. Wat was Jesus se hoofsending gedurende sy lewe?
3. Watter eienskappe sien jy in Jesus?
4. Hoe moet jy jou lewe verander sodat dit in ooreenstemming is met Jesus se waardes en prioriteite?
5. Op watter wyse het Jesus se woorde en optrede geopenbaar dat Hy gelyk is aan God?
6. Hoe sal jy reageer op die vraag: “Hoe kan jy seker wees dat Jesus God is?”
7. Wat kan jy doen om ’n dieper liefde vir Jesus te hê? Hoekom is dit belangrik?

26. Die uur van duisternis

1. Wat het Jesus voorspel tydens die laaste ete saam met sy dissipels?
2. Hoekom moes Jesus sterf?
3. Hoe het Jesus se volgelingen op die tragiese gebeure gereageer?
4. Watter implikasies het Jesus se dood aan die kruis vir die mensdom se sondes vir jou?
5. Wat kan jy deur hierdie gebeure leer van Jesus se liefde?
6. Hoe het Jesus se lewe en dood die manier geraak hoe jy jou lewe daaglik leef?

27. Die opstanding

1. Hoekom het sommige van Jesus se volgelingen na sy graf toe gekom na sy dood? Wat sê dit vir jou van vriendskap en lojaliteit onder Jesus se metgeselle?
2. Glo jy dat Jesus uit die dood opgestaan het? Hoekom?
3. Hoe dink jy het die mense se lewens verander nadat Jesus ná sy opstanding aan hulle verskyn het?
4. Wat openbaar Jesus se opstanding uit die dood oor God se mag oor lewe en sonde?
5. Watter verskil maak of kan die besef maak dat Jesus vandag lewe?

6. Voordat Jesus na die hemel opgevaar het, het Hy vir sy dissipels gesê: “Gaan dan, maak al die nasies my dissipels.” As jy ’n gelowige is, wanneer laas het jy met iemand gepraat oor jou geloof in Jesus?

28. ’n Nuwe begin

1. Hoekom was Petrus se preek op Pinksterdag so effektief?
2. Hoekom het die Joodse godsdienstige leiers nie van die vroeë Christene gehou nie?
3. Watter voorbeelde van Christelike liefde en gemeenskap sien jy in hierdie hoofstuk?
4. Watter faktore het gehelp dat die Goeie Nuus van Jesus Christus so vinnig versprei het?
5. Hoe was die vroeë Christene in staat om te midde van uiters moeilike omstandighede getrou te bly?
6. Watter praktiese stappe kan jy neem om meer geloof te hê?
7. Hoe verduidelik jy die drastiese veranderings in Saulus (Paulus) se lewe?

29. Paulus se sending

1. Wat was Paulus se passie en missie nadat hy die Here gevind het?
2. Wat is jou passie en missie in die lewe?
3. Hoekom het Paulus sy uitreik altyd in die Joodse sinagoge begin wanneer hy in ’n nuwe stad aangekom het?
4. Hoe sal jy “die evangelie” definieer?
5. Watter impak het die evangelie op jou lewe?
6. Wat sou met Christenskap gebeur het as die Joodse gelowiges se aandrang dat die nie-Jode eers Jode moes word, suksesvol was?
7. Wat openbaar Paulus se brief aan die Romeine vir ons oor verlossing?

30. Paulus se laaste dae

1. Hoe was Paulus in staat om die pyn en beproewings wat hy vir sy geloof moes ly te verduur?
2. Wat kan jy uit Paulus se lewe leer oor hoe om moeilike omstandighede te trotseer?

3. Hoekom was Paulus bereid om gevaar so openlik te trotseer?
4. Watter karaktereenskappe sien jy in Paulus?
5. Wat kan jy prakties doen om karaktereenskappe soos Paulus s'n te kweek?
6. Hoe sal jy Paulus se boodskap opsom?

31. Die eindtyd

1. Hoe het Johannes gereageer toe hy vir Jesus in die visioen gesien het? Hoekom het hy so gereageer?
2. Watter waarskuwing het Jesus vir die kerke? Hoe is hierdie waarskuwings op jou van toepassing?
3. Wat leer jy oor God uit sy optrede en beskrywings in hierdie hoofstuk?
4. Wat leer 'n mens uit hierdie hoofstuk oor hoe die hemel sal wees?
5. Hoekom is dit belangrik om oor die hemel te dink en jou hoop daarop te stel?
6. Watter stappe kan jy neem om jou hoop meer volledig te plaas op wat jy van die ewigheid weet in hierdie hoofstuk?

Characters

Adam: The first man, husband of Eve. Created by God out of dust. Adam sinned when he ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Eve: The first woman, wife of Adam. Created by God from Adam's rib. Eve sinned when she ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Noah: At God's command, Noah built an ark to save himself, his family and the animals from a flood sent to wipe out humanity.

Abraham: The founding father of Israel. He was a model of faith in God, who promised him the land of Canaan and the legacy of being the father of a great nation.

Sarah: The wife of Abraham. She was infertile, but God enabled her to give birth to Isaac in her old age.

Isaac: One of the patriarchs of Israel. His birth was miraculous because his mother, Sarah, had been infertile and was 90 years old. His children were Jacob and Esau.

Rebekah: A member of Abraham's extended family. She married Isaac and had twin boys: Jacob and Esau.

Jacob: Also called "Israel," Jacob was another patriarch of the Israelite nation. He had 12 sons, whose descendants formed the 12 tribes of Israel.

Leah: Unloved wife of Jacob and sister of Rachel. She struggled with her situation, but came to trust in God as she gave birth to six sons and a daughter.

Rachel: Beloved wife of Jacob and sister of Leah. Her infertility caused strife between her and her sister. However, God eventually blessed her with two sons: Joseph and Benjamin.

Joseph: Jacob's favorite son. His jealous brothers sold him into slavery, but he rose to prominence in Egypt and brought his family to live there during a famine.

Moses: Used by God to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Moses was God's spokesman to the people and gave them the Law.

Joshua: Succeeded Moses and led the Israelites' conquest of Canaan.

Deborah: One of Israel's judges (leaders who brought deliverance from foreign oppressors). She ordered Barak to move against Sisera's army but predicted that Sisera himself would be killed by a woman.

Gideon: One of Israel's judges. Using unorthodox tactics commanded by God, he reluctantly led the Israelites to victory against their Midianite oppressors.

Samson: One of Israel's judges. God gave him superhuman strength. He had a lifelong rivalry with the Philistines, whom he

defeated at the cost of his own life.

Ruth: A Moabite woman during the time of the judges. After her Israelite husband died, she left her homeland to return to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, Naomi. She became the great-grandmother of King David.

Samuel: A great prophet and the last judge of Israel. He anointed Saul and David as Israel's kings.

Saul: The first king of Israel. His repeated disobedience to God during his reign led to its ignominious end. He was succeeded by David, whom he repeatedly tried to kill.

David: The second king of Israel, father of Solomon. David was devoted to God, and Israel flourished under him, but his reign was marred by his adultery with Bathsheba.

Nathan: A prophet during David's rule. Nathan supported David but confronted him about his adultery with Bathsheba.

Bathsheba: David committed adultery with her and then murdered her husband, Uriah. Bathsheba then married David, and later she gave birth to Solomon.

Solomon: Son of David. He was the third king of Israel and the world's wisest man. He built an extraordinary temple but then strayed into idolatry. After his reign, the kingdom divided.

Rehoboam: Son of Solomon. He was the first king of Judah during the Divided Kingdom era. His oppressive policies prompted the northern tribes, led by Jeroboam, to rebel.

Jeroboam: The first king of Israel during the Divided Kingdom era. In fulfillment of God's predicted punishment of Solomon's idolatry, Jeroboam rebelled against Rehoboam and split the kingdom.

Ahab: A king of Israel, husband of Jezebel. He was weak as a king, opposed Elijah and died after being wounded by a random arrow in battle.

Jezebel: Queen of Israel and Ahab's wife. She encouraged idolatry

in the kingdom and threatened Elijah's life after he challenged the prophets of Baal.

Elijah: A prophet of Israel during the Divided Kingdom era. His chief opponents were Ahab, Jezebel and the prophets of Baal. Instead of dying, he ascended to heaven in a whirlwind.

Elisha: Elijah's successor. Astonishing miracles characterized his ministry. The king he appointed, Jehu, killed Jezebel and the remaining prophets of Baal.

Amos: A shepherd and prophet in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II. He foretold disaster for the nation because the people refused to return to God.

Hosea: A prophet in Israel just after Amos. God had Hosea marry an adulterous woman named Gomer. The drama of their relationship mirrored Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

Hoshea: The last king of Israel. The king of Assyria arrested him and invaded the whole land of Israel because Hoshea had stopped paying him tribute.

Hezekiah: A king of Judah. He reigned at the same time as Hoshea but trusted in God and was able to resist Assyria's army.

Isaiah: A prophet in Judah. He supported Hezekiah's struggle against Assyria and foretold both the exile of Judah to Babylon and its return.

Jeremiah: A prophet to Judah just before the Babylonian captivity. He foretold the exile and a return after 70 years; he also witnessed Jerusalem's destruction.

Nebuchadnezzar: The king of Babylon who invaded Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. He plundered Solomon's temple, destroyed Jerusalem and removed Judah's population to Babylon.

Zedekiah: The last king of Judah. He rebelled against Babylon. Following his capture, his sons were killed before his eyes and then his eyes were put out. He was taken to Babylon where he died.

Ezekiel: A prophet to Judah before and during the Babylonian captivity. He prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the eventual return from exile.

Daniel: A prophet during the exile and a high-ranking administrator under both the Babylonians and Persians. He prophesied about the future of Babylon and the empires that would follow. God delivered him from his enemies' dramatic opposition.

Cyrus: The king of Persia who overthrew Babylon. He permitted the exiles to return to Judah and ordered the temple to be rebuilt.

Zerubbabel: A member of Judah's royal family who led the first group of exiles back to Judah and eventually led the successful effort to rebuild the temple.

Ezra: A priest who led the second group of exiles back to Judah and renewed the people's faithfulness to God's Word.

Haggai: A prophet during the return from the exile. Haggai motivated the people to rebuild the temple.

Zechariah: A prophet during the return from the exile. Like Haggai, he motivated the people to rebuild the temple. He also prophesied the restoration and prosperity of God's people.

Esther: The Jewish queen of the Persian Empire during the reign of Xerxes. She exposed a plot to kill the Jews.

Mordecai: Esther's cousin. Mordecai raised Esther, guided her when she became queen and uncovered a conspiracy to assassinate the king.

Nehemiah: Appointed governor of Judah by the king of Persia, he directed the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem, countering opposition from the rulers of surrounding regions.

Malachi: The last prophet of the Old Testament era. He preached judgment and repentance to Judah, and prophesied the return, in a sense, of Elijah — fulfilled by John the Baptist.

Mary: The mother of Jesus. Jesus' birth was miraculous because

Mary was still a virgin when she conceived. She was also present at Jesus' crucifixion.

Joseph: Jesus' adoptive father. At the command of an angel in a dream, he married Mary despite the scandal of her out-of-wed-lock pregnancy.

Jesus: The promised Messiah and Son of God. He carried out a three-year ministry of preaching and miracle-working, traveling with his disciples. He was executed by crucifixion but rose to life three days later.

John the Baptist: The prophet who prepared the Jews for Jesus' ministry. He preached repentance and baptized people in the Jordan River. John was imprisoned and later beheaded for criticizing Herod.

Peter: One of Jesus' disciples. Peter was outspoken and fiercely devoted to Jesus, though during Jesus' trial Peter denied knowing him. After Jesus' resurrection, Peter was the key leader of the church in Jerusalem.

James and John: Two brothers who were disciples of Jesus. They were part of Jesus' inner circle and were close friends of Jesus. They both continued to work to spread the Good News after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Mary and Martha: Sisters and supporters of Jesus and his ministry. Their brother was Lazarus.

Lazarus: Friend and supporter of Jesus. He died of an illness, but Jesus raised him back to life after four days.

Judas Iscariot: The disciple who betrayed Jesus. He led the temple guards to Jesus the night before his crucifixion. Judas later committed suicide.

Pilate: The Roman governor who sentenced Jesus to death.

Stephen: The first Christian martyr. The Jewish authorities stoned Stephen for allegedly speaking against the Law of Moses and the temple. His death sparked a rash of persecution against the church.

Barnabas: One of Paul's missionary partners. When Paul began to follow Jesus, Barnabas was one of his first supporters. He accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey.

Paul: Paul persecuted the church until he became a believer when Jesus dramatically appeared to him. He became a missionary and the apostle to the Gentiles. Paul wrote much of the New Testament.

Karakters

Adam: Die eerste mens, Eva se man. Deur God geskep uit stof. Adam het gesondig toe hy van die boom van kennis van reg en verkeerd geëet het.

Eva: Die eerste vrou, Adam se vrou. Deur God geskep uit Adam se ribbebeen. Eva het gesondig toe hy van die boom van kennis van reg en verkeerd geëet het.

Noag: In opdrag van God het Noag 'n ark gebou om homself, sy familie en die diere te red van die vloed wat die mensdom vernietig het.

Abraham: Die voorvader van Israel. Hy was 'n voorbeeld in geloof in God, wat aan hom die land Kanaän en 'n groot nageslag beloof het.

Sara: Die vrou van Abraham. Sy was onvrugbaar, maar God het haar in staat gestel om op 'n hoë ouderdom geboorte te gee aan Isak.

Isak: Een van Israel se patriarge. Sy geboorte was 'n wonderwerk, want sy ma, Sara, was onvrugbaar en was al 90 jaar oud. Sy kinders was Jakob en Esau.

Rebekka: 'n Lid van Abraham se uitgebreide familie. Sy het met Isak getrou en 'n tweeling gehad: Jakob en Esau.

Jakob: Ook genoem "Israel". Jakob was nog 'n patriarg van die Israel-nasie. Hy het twaalf seuns gehad, wie se nageslag die twaalf stamme van Israel uitgemaak het.

Lea: Sy was Jakob se vrou wat hy nie liefgehad het nie en Ragel se suster. Sy het geworstel met haar situasie, maar het op God vertrou terwyl sy geboorte gegee het aan ses seuns en 'n dogter.

Ragel: Jakob se geliefde vrou en suster van Lea. Haar onvrugbaarheid

het onmin tussen haar en haar suster veroorsaak. God het haar egter uiteindelik geseën met twee seuns: Josef en Benjamin.

Josef: Jakob se gunsteling seun. Sy jaloerse broers het hom in slawerny verkoop, maar hy het 'n belangrike posisie ingeneem in Egipte en sy familie gebring om daar te kom bly.

Moses: God het hom gebruik om die Israeliete uit slawerny in Egipte te bevry. Moses was God se woordvoerder en het vir die mense die wet gegee.

Josua: Hy het vir Moses opgevolg en die Israeliete in oorwinning in Kanaän ingelei.

Debora: Een van Israel se rigters (leiers wat die Israeliete van hulle heidense onderdrukkers gered het). Sy het Barak opdrag gegee om teen Sisera se weermag op te trek, maar het voorspel dat Sisera deur 'n vrou doodgemaak sou word.

Gideon: Een van die rigters. Hy het onortodokse taktieke gebruik om die Israeliete teësinig na oorwinning te lei teen die Midianiete.

Simson: Een van Israel se rigters. God het vir hom bomenslike krag gegee. Hy was in 'n lewenslange stryd met die Filistyne gewikkel, wat hy oorwin het deur sy eie lewe te gee.

Rut: 'n Moabitiese vrou gedurende die tyd van die rigters. Nadat haar Israelitiese man gesterf het, het sy haar tuisland verlaat en saam met haar skoonma, Naomi, na Betlehem teruggekeer. Sy het koning Dawid se oumagrootjie geword.

Samuel: 'n Groot profeet en die laaste rigter in Israel. Hy het vir Saul en Dawid as Israel se konings gesalf.

Saul: Die eerste koning van Israel. Sy aanhoudende ongehoorsaamheid teenoor God tydens sy bewind het tot 'n oneervolle dood gelei. Hy is opgevolg deur Dawid vir wie hy herhaaldelik probeer vermoor het.

Dawid: Die tweede koning van Israel en pa van Salomo. Dawid was getrou aan God, en Israel het floreer onder hom, maar sy bewind is geskend deur sy owerspel met Batseba.

Natan: 'n Profeet gedurende Dawid se bewind. Natan het vir Dawid ondersteun, maar het hom oor sy egbreuk met Batseba gekonfronteer.

Batseba: Dawid het egbreuk gepleeg met haar en toe haar man, Urija, vermoor. Batseba het toe met Dawid getrou, en later het sy geboorte gegee aan Salomo.

Salomo: Dawid se seun. Hy was die derde koning van Israel en die wêreld se wysste man. Hy het 'n buitengewone tempel gebou, maar toe in afgodsaanbidding verval. Ná sy bewind is die koninkryk in twee verdeel.

Rehabeam: Salomo se seun. Hy was die eerste koning van Juda gedurende die verdeelde ryk era. Sy onderdrukkende beleid het die noordelike stamme, onder leiding van Jerobeam, aangemoedig om te rebelleer.

Jerobeam: Die eerste koning van Israel ná die ryk verdeel is. In volvoering van God se voorspelde straf van Salomo se afgodsaanbidding, het Jerobeam teen Rehabeam gerebelleer en die koninkryk in twee verdeel.

Agab: 'n Koning van Israel en man van Isebel. Hy was 'n swak koning, het Elia teëgestaan en het gesterf nadat hy deur 'n dwaalpyl getref is.

Isebel: Koningin van Israel en vrou van Agab. Sy het afgodsaanbidding aangemoedig en het Elia se lewe bedreig nadat hy die Baälprofete uitgedaag het.

Elia: 'n Profeet van Israel gedurende die era van die verdeelde ryk. Sy hooftenstanders was Agab, Isebel en die Baälprofete. Hy het nie gesterf nie, maar is opgeneem in die hemel.

Elisa: Elia se opvolger. Sy bediening is gekenmerk deur ongelooflike wonderwerke. Die koning wat hy aangewys het, Jehu, het vir Isebel en die oorblywende Baälprofete doodgemaak.

Amos: 'n Skaapwagter en profeet in Israel gedurende Jerobeam II se bewind. Hy het vertel van die tragedie wat die nasie sou tref omdat die mense geweier het om terug te draai na God toe.

Hosea: 'n Profeet in Israel net na Amos. God het Hosea met 'n

owerspelige vrou met die naam Gomer laat trou. Die drama van hulle verhouding was 'n spieëlbeeld van Israel se ontrouheid aan God.

Hosea: Die laaste koning van Israel: Die koning van Assirië het hom gearrester en Israel ingeval omdat Hosea opgehou het om belasting te betaal.

Hiskia: 'n Koning van Juda. Hy het in dieselfde tyd as Hosea regeer, maar het op God vertrou en was in staat om die Assiriese weermag teen te staan.

Jesaja: 'n Profeet in Juda. Hy het Hiskia se stryd teen Assirië ondersteun en geprofeteer oor beide Juda se toekomstige verbanning na Babilon en hulle terugkeer.

Jeremia: 'n Profeet vir Juda net voor die Babiloniese gevangenskap. Hy het vertel van die ballingskap en terugkeer na 70 jaar; hy was ook ooggetuie van Jerusalem se verwoesting.

Nebukadnesar: Die koning van Babilon wat Juda ingeval het en Jerusalem beleër het. Hy het Salomo se tempel geplunder, Jerusalem verwoes en Juda se mense weggevoer na Babilon.

Sedekia: Die laaste koning van Juda. Hy het in opstand gekom teen Babilon. Ná sy gevangenneming is sy seuns voor sy oë doodgemaak en toe is sy oë uitgesteek. Hy is na Babilon geneem waar hy gesterf het.

Esegiël: 'n Profeet vir Juda voor en gedurende die Babiloniese gevangenskap. Hy het geprofeteer oor die verwoesting van Jerusalem en die uiteindelijke terugkeer.

Daniël: 'n Profeet tydens die ballingskap en 'n hooggeplaaste administrateur onder beide die Babiloniërs en die Perse. Hy het geprofeteer oor die toekoms van Babilon en die ryke wat sou volg. God het hom bevry van sy vyand se dramatiese teenstand.

Kores: Die koning van Persië wat Babilon tot 'n val gebring het. Hy het die ballinge toestemming gegee om terug te keer na Juda en het opdrag gegee dat die tempel herbou moes word.

Serubbabel: 'n Lid van Juda se koninklike familie wat die eerste groep bannelinge teruggelei het na Juda en uiteindelik die suksesvolle

herbouing van die tempel.

Esra: 'n Priester wat die tweede groep bannelinge teruggelei het na Juda en die mense se getrouheid aan God se Woord hernu het.

Haggai: 'n Profeet gedurende die bannelinge se terugkeer. Haggai het die mense gemotiveer om die tempel te herbou.

Sagaria: 'n Profeet gedurende die bannelinge se terugkeer. Soos Haggai het hy die mense gemotiveer om die tempel te herbou. Hy het ook geprofeteer oor die herstel en voorspoed van God se mense.

Ester: Die Joodse koningin van die Persiese Ryk gedurende Ahasveros se bewind. Sy het 'n komplot om die Jode dood te maak, blootgelê.

Mordegai: Ester se neef. Mordegai het vir Ester grootgemaak, haar gelei toe sy koningin geword het en 'n komplot om die koning te vermoor, ontbloot.

Nehemia: Deur die koning van Persië as goewerneur van Juda aangestel. Hy was in beheer van die herbou van die muur om Jerusalem, en het teenstand van die omliggende streke se leiers ondervind.

Maleagi: Die laaste profeet van die Ou-Testamentiese era. Hy het gepreek oor oordeel en berou en geprofeteer oor die terugkeer van, in 'n sin, Elia – wat volvoer is in Johannes die Doper.

Maria: Jesus se ma. Jesus se geboorte was 'n wonderwerk, want Maria was steeds 'n maagd toe sy swanger geword het. Sy was ook teenwoordig tydens Jesus se kruisiging.

Josef: Jesus se aanneempa. In opdrag van 'n engel in 'n droom trou hy met Maria, ten spyte van die skande van haar buite-egtelike swangerskap.

Jesus: Die belofde Messias en Seun van God. Sy bediening het drie jaar geduur waarin Hy gepreek, wonderwerke gedoen en saam met sy dissipels gereis het. Hy word gekruisig en staan dan drie dae later uit die dood op.

Johannes die Doper: Die profeet wat die Jode voorberei het vir Jesus

se bediening. Hy het gepraat dat die mense berou moet toon en het mense in die Jordaanrivier gedoop. Johannes is gevange geneem en is later onthoof nadat hy vir Herodes gekritiseer het.

Petrus: Een van Jesus se dissipels. Petrus was uitgesproke en baie toegewyd aan Jesus, alhoewel hy tydens Jesus se verhoor ontken het dat hy Hom ken. Ná Jesus se opstanding was Petrus die leier van die kerk in Jerusalem.

Jakobus en Johannes: Twee broers wat dissipels van Jesus was. Hulle was deel van Jesus se binnekring en was goeie vriende van Jesus. Hulle het albei voortgegaan om die Goeie Nuus te versprei ná Jesus se kruisiging en opstanding.

Maria en Marta: Susters en ondersteuners van Jesus en sy bediening. Lasarus was hulle broer.

Lasarus: 'n Vriend en ondersteuner van Jesus. Hy het gesterf na 'n siekbed, maar Jesus het hom na vier dae uit die dood laat opstaan.

Judas Iskariot: Die dissipel wat vir Jesus verrai het. Hy het die tempelwagte na Jesus toe gelei die nag voor sy kruisiging. Judas het later selfmoord gepleeg.

Pilatus: Die Romeinse goewerneur wat Jesus na sy dood gestuur het.

Stefanus: Die eerste Christen-martelaar. Die Joodse leiers het Stefanus gestenig omdat hy na bewering teen die Wet van Moses en die tempel gepraat het. Sy dood het gelei tot die vervolging van die kerk.

Barnabas: Een van Paulus se sendeling-kollegas. Toe Paulus Jesus begin volg het, was Barnabas een van sy eerste ondersteuners. Hy het saam met Paulus op sy eerste sendingreis gegaan.

Paulus: Paulus het die kerk vervolg totdat hy 'n gelowige geword het toe Jesus op dramatiese wyse aan hom verskyn het. Hy het 'n sendeling geword en 'n apostel vir die nie-Jode. Paulus het groot gedeeltes van die Nuwe Testament geskryf.

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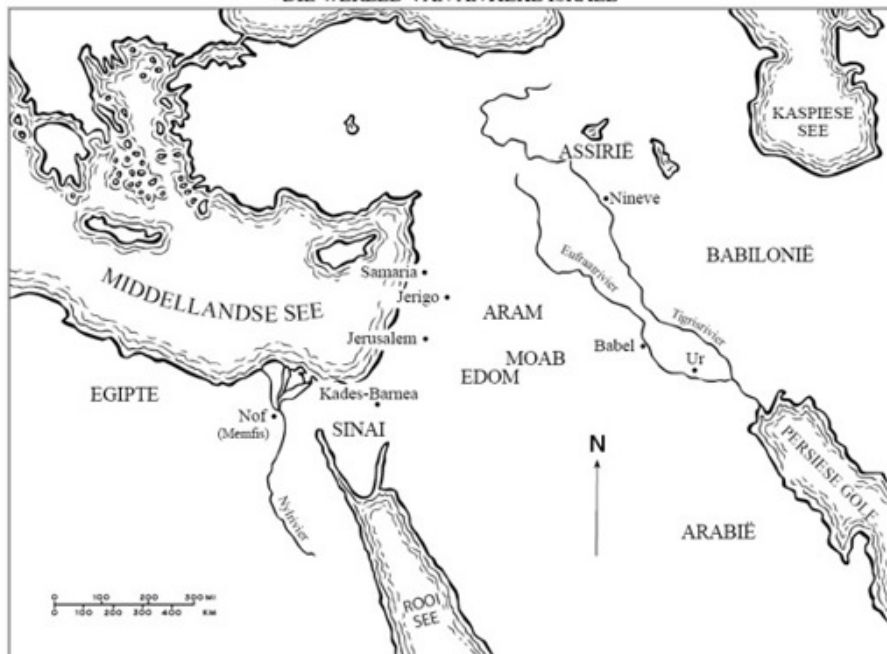
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